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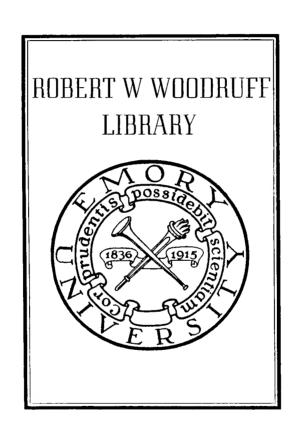
BY

## ARCHIBALD BOYD,

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### THE CARDINAL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE DUCHESS,"



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#### INTRODUCTION.

In the year 1719, George I. filled the throne of Great Britain. Still his seat was by no means a secure one. The Stuarts, the rightful heirs to the Crown, if there be aught of Divine right in the succession of kingdoms, had a strong party in the country; and though the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 had been successfully put down, it was notorious that its embers rather slumbered than were extinguished. What contributed, perhaps, even more than internal dis-

content to keep up its dormant fires, was external agency.

In all the continental wars which England had waged since 1688. the cause of the exiled family had, as a matter of course, been taken up by her opponents, as the simplest and most natural mode of diverting the strength of the British Government from foreign objects, by giving it employment at home. Such had been the constant policy of Louis XIV. during the long struggle which terminated in the Peace of Utrecht; and since his death, the system had been continued by every nation which threatened or offered hostilities, and more especially by Spain.

That monarchy, while Charles of Austria ruled it, had been the most powerful in Europe, from the talents of its Sovereign, the character of its population, and its immense territorial extent. The three causes of supremacy were short-lived. Under Philip II., indeed, the still unexhausted energy of the empire continued to impart to its successor a momentary vitality; but each tenant of the throne grew weaker, in proportion as he was removed from the parent intellect; and under Philip III., Philip IV., and Charles II. the royalty of Spain descended in turns from the bigot to the voluptuary, and from the voluptuary to the dotard. The people. too, shared the decay. A common object, the conquest of the Moors, had forced them into greatness by the necessity for daily and combined action; but the virtue disappeared with the cause which produced it. Then came the effect of the gold of the New World. The wealth won without labour demoralized them; the folly of one king by the expulsion of the Moriscoes, exiled the most industrious part of the population; the superior fanaticism of another lost the one half of the Netherlands, and paralyzed the remainder; while the younger branch of the royal house possessed themselves of the original patrimony of their race—the German territory, and no small portion of the north of Italy.

weakened alike by the deterioration of rulers and subjects, and the dismemberment of many of its fairest provinces, Spain at the death of Charles II. without children, presented but an enfeebled kingdom. Such as it was, however, its possession became an object of ambition to the greater dynasties of Europe.

The History of the War of the Succession is well known. On the one side, Louis XIV insisted on placing the crown of Spain on the head of his grandson, partly on the ground of a will of King Charles II. in his favour, and partly on account of his descent from Maria Teresa, the wife of Louis, and the Infanta of Spain. England, on the other hand, and Austria supported the claims of the Arch-Duke

Charles, a prince of the house of Hapsburg.

The contest was long and varied in its fortunes. The Catalonians and Valencians adopted the cause of the Austrian-the Castilians that of the Duke of Anjou, or as he was called Philip V. The two competitors for the throne, equally contemptible in character and conduct, possessed and exercised little influence over the events with which their names were connected. The real struggle was between France and England. On the one side was Lord Peterborough, better known as the chivalrous Lord Mordaunt, together with Lord Stanhope and the Earl of Galway. On the other, were the Duke of Orleans, the Duke of Vendôme, and the Duke of Berwick, the son of Arabella Churchill by King James, and The fortunes of the French prevailed. nephew of Marlborough. The battles of Almanza and Villa Viciosa secured the crown to the grandson of Louis, and the peace of Utrecht terminated a war which involved England in an enormous mass of debt, and was as unjustifiable in its objects as the partition of Poland.

While the hostile armies were alternately conquering or losing the Spanish provinces, the semblance of a government was carried on at Madrid by Philip V., or rather by the Princess of Ursins. This extraordinary woman—the Camerera Mayor, or, as we should phrase it, the Mistress of the Robes to the Queen-ruled over Spain for twelve years with absolute authority. The influence she possessed, though, in some degree, the consequence of her own talent and energies, derived its chief strength from the facility of temper of the two sovereigns. On the Queen's death, it was decided that the King should marry again, and when to the female Prime Minister was left the selection of the bride, it became to her a matter of the last importance, that the future mate of the head of the monarchy should resemble her predecessor and her husband in her disposition to obey. The possession of this quality by a Princess of Parma had been guaranteed to Madame des Ursins by an Italian abbé of the name of Alberoni; and it formed, in fact, the chief reason for the elevation of Elizabeth Farnese to the Spanish

throne.

The praise, if it were praise, was undeserved. Alberoni had deceived his patroness. The new consort of Philip possessed a spirit not only haughty but imperious, and on her first interview

with the Camerera Mayor, had her arrested and sent into exile. The scheme had been devised beforehand by Alberoni himself, and the Queen (for Philip's indolence prevented his interfering) repaid the obligation by making her wily counsellor Prime Minister. The Pope, ever eager to honour rising power, bestowed a Cardinal's hat, and an unknown priest became at once one of the princes of the Church, and the wielder of the destinies of a mighty empire.

The political neophyte was not unequal to the task. He had considerable talents, and had they been applied to the peaceful development of the wealth of the Peninsula, his name would have gone down to posterity as that of a great minister. Unfortunately, his useful qualities were neutralized by an extravagant ambition, and the state of Europe offered an apparent facility for the gratification

of it.

Louis XIV. was dead; Louis XV., his great-grandson, was a boy; and the Duke of Orleans, the first prince of the blood, was at the head of the French government under the name of Regent. This office Alberoni claimed for his master, who was the young King's uncle and nearest relative; while at the same time he demanded for the children of the new Queen of Spain a sovereignty in Italy. The propositions were not extravagant in themselves, but behind them lurked schemes which threatened the tranquillity of half Europe, and these, as they became developed, awoke general alarm and

opposition.

The minister of Philip met the storm bravely. His talents breathed at once into the Spanish executive a vitality which it had not known for a century. Troops were raised, fleets built and manned, and money liberally contributed by the middle-classes and the grandees. Nor were his exertions merely confined to the interior of Spain. They made themselves felt in every part of Europe. He had to fear the opposition of Austria, of England, of Holland, and of France. He determined to find them employment at home. He bribed the Turks to attack the Emperor. He persuaded Charles XII. of Sweden, just returned from his Ottoman prison, and in want of somebody to fight with, to take up the cause of the Pretender, and support the Jacobite party in England. He lulled the Dutch into neutrality by a commercial treaty; and, through the medium of his ambassador at Paris, the Prince of Cellamare, formed a powerful conspiracy against the regent Duke of Orleans.

In the first instance fortune favoured him, and the Spanish troops took with facility possession of Sardinia and Sicily. But all at once the luck turned. The English fleet, under Byng, annihilated the Spanish navy off Syracuse; the Turks were defeated by the Imperialists; Charles XII. was killed at Frederickshall; the conspiracy of the Prince of Cellamare was discovered; and the Duke of Berwick, at the head of a French army, entered Spain, and after besieging with success Fontarabia, and St. Sebastian, threatened the very existence of the monarchy.

The near approach of danger terrified Philip and his Queen out of their apathy, and they insisted on the Cardinal accepting the truce which the allies offered, and peace once more reigned in Europe.

Alberoni did not intend it to be permanent. He had accepted the suspension of arms merely to gain time for arranging his future operations, and while in public he breathed only the most pacific intentions, he was in fact busily employed in collecting forces and funds for a future struggle. Nor were the allies idle. They were not deceived by the meek professions of their ecclesiastical opponent; and as George I. had no wish to go back to his electorate, or the Regent Orleans to descend from sovereign power to the rank of a prince of the blood, they determined on removing from the Spanish executive, a man, who had proved himself alike to have the means and the will to endanger their position.

Many and various were the discussions on the subject between the representatives of the allied princes, and it is while the Italian priest is still all powerful at Madrid, and France and England are combining in the hope of effecting his downfall, that begins our story.

#### THE CARDINAL.

#### CHAPTER I.

#### IRUN.

THERE are few more lovely localities on earth than that which meets the eye of the traveller who approaches from France the Spanish frontier. The undulating country through which he pursues his southward route is dotted over with villages, and has its inequalities richly clothed with oak and chestnut. On the right is the ocean, lashing against the iron-bound coast of Spain. On the left, and further inland, towers the great mountain wall of the Pyrenees; while in front runs the Bidassoa, bathing with its waters the picturesque Moorish stronghold of Fontarabia.

The ancient highway which leads from Paris to Madrid crosses the river, (the boundary of the rival empires,) near the island which was the celebrated seat of the conference that ended in the marriage of Louis XIV with the Infanta Maria Theresa. Almost from its bank, the road rises rapidly until it reaches Irun, the northernmost of the Spanish post-towns, and distant a league and a-half from the French frontier.

It was about six o'clock of the morning of the 23rd of October. 1719, that the little burgh seemed gradually throwing off its slumbers and preparing for the labours of the day. In the main street was the principal inn, distinguished by its superior size to the buildings around it, but more especially by some muleteers, who were partly congregated near its entrance, and partly employed in leading backwards and forwards their mules to water at a stream in the neighbourhood. Over the great gate, and in one of the verandahs opening from the solitary sitting-room, stood the host himself, in dirty shirt, loose brown cloth small-clothes, and worsted stockings, all somewhat the worst for wear. A pair of sandals were upon his feet, and his face and chin showed a perfect unacquaintance with soap or razor since last fête-day. The Boniface was enjoying his cigarito, or paper cigar, and occasionally interchanging with the group below a half sentence, uttered with that listless apathy which marks in Spain the man and the class. For though a Spanish innkeeper understands making out a bill and pillaging the unfortunate victims who trust themselves to the protection of his roof as well as any of the fraternity, he is still too

conscious of his rank and personal importance to trouble himself

about the wants or comforts of his guests.

The apathy, however, of the posadero of Irun, and that of his companions, was in some degree broken by the appearance of an ecclesiastic, evidently the parish priest, who approached for the purpose of taking his usual cup of chocolate, and hearing the news of the day. The new comer was a little thin man, with a hooked nose, and a deep-set, piercing black eye. The physiognomy and person had something of an Arab character; they were spare and thin; and, if any opinion might be formed from their outline and expression, with abundance of latent energy. The step, notwith-standing, affected timidity, and the whole manner was that of one who plays a part, yet is not sufficiently an actor to leave others unconscious of his acting. To a Spaniard, however, a churchman is always an object of veneration; and the hats of the muleteers and the host were reverentially moved from their heads as they respectfully acknowledged his presence.

The priest, in reply, responded to the courtesy by sweeping the ground with his enormous beaver, whose brim, some eighteen inches in breadth, projected before and behind, but was drawn up tight on either side, and lapped over the crown. He then made his way through the great gate, and by that to the staircase which led from the stable to the apartments of the guests. On mounting it, he entered the public room, from one of the windows of which, the host had been airing himself in the verandah. Again did the master of the house welcome his distinguished visitor, and again the courtesy was replied to by the clerical sombrero sweeping the floor.

'The best of the morning to your reverence!' said the host; 'I

trust I see you well.'

'Thanks to the Virgin, Don Esteban, never better.'

'And your reverence comes, no doubt, for your chocolate. It shall be prepared on the instant. Jacinta,' cried he, 'the chocolate for his reverence;' and without waiting to ascertain whether his instructions were heard, or likely to be obeyed, he advanced to the priest and held out his cigarito. He seemed to be well understood, for the holy father, with a smile and a nod, acknowledged the attention, produced from his side-pocket a bundle of paper cigars, selected one from the number, and availed himself of the light offered him. This done, the parties flung themselves upon benches opposite each other, and continued to smoke gravely for some time without uttering a syllable.

'Well, Don Esteban,' said the priest, at length, 'what news this

morning?' 'None, your reverence.'

'What! no arrivals last night? I should have thought that the truce after the long war would have covered the road with travellers, and made the fortunes of the innkeepers.'

Why, no, Don Jeronimo; not much doing. No arrivals since those of the two ladies I told you of yesterday morning.

'What! are they still here?' 'Even so.'

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'Quien sabe.' 'And their names?'

'But how is it I have never seen them in the public room?'

'They keep their chamber, and are waited on by an old gentlemanusher and a waiting-maid.'

'And where are they going?' 'They are bound for Madrid: and have engaged two litters, and mules for their baggage enough

for a grandee.

- 'And with all this, man, can't you find out their names?" Don Jeronimo, it is no business of mine; and I never put my spoon into other people's porridge. All that I know is, the two dames are -one old, and one young; and from their dress, are clearly enough a senorita and her duenna.
  - 'You are sure that neither of them is a man?'

'Ca—your reverence, you are mocking me. As for the senorita, she is as handsome a creature as ever wore mantilla, and high-born too. I warrant: and I have enough of the caballero in me to know when I see blue blood in the veins. And then, such eyes—and such a waist! Ca. There's not a girl in Aspeitia or Ascoytia fit to hold the candle to her; and they are the handsomest women in the Three Provinces.'

'No blue blood there, Don Esteban,' said the priest, laughing. 'If old stories be true, the Arabs camped there for a year, and that,' continued he, with a nod, 'if it spoiled the blood, may have some-

thing to do with the beauty.'

'Ho! ho! ho! your reverence is a wag. But blue blood or not,

I'll warrant the senorita as handsome as Donna Florinda.'

'But the other?' said the persevering priest, who seemed to have

some reason for his curiosity.

'No, Don Jeronimo, she is not a man either, but a thorough-bred duenna, with a toque on her head, and steel busks to her stays, and a hoop so large, that I doubt much if they get her into the litter. But your reverence is curious? Do you expect any one?"

'No, no, no,' said the priest, hurriedly; 'I am expecting nothing,

Don Esteban, but my chocolate.'

'Madre de Dios, that's true; I had forgot the chocolate. Jacinta,' cried he, raising his voice, but without moving from his seat, 'his reverence's chocolate;' and having thus satisfied his conscience as to the proper discharge of his duties as a host, he once more resumed smoking his cigarito.

'And so,' continued the priest, 'you have had no men travellers?'

'None whatever. But I had forgotten: last night there did take place an arrival in which your reverence would have been much Ha!' said the curé, and Don Jeronimo's sleepy eyes sparkled with fire. 'And who was that?'

'The deacon and under-deacon of St. Jago de Compostella, bearing a new periwig and pair of small-clothes for the Saint,' and Don

Esteban crossed himself reverentially.

So did the padre, and with well-affected devotion: but there was a contemptuous curl on the upper lip, which, to a close observer

might have intimated that he did not attach much consequence to the intelligence. He appeared to reflect for some time, and at last, as if uncertain what to say or do, returned to his original subject, and once more asked for his chocolate. This third intimation of the wants of the holy father, together, perhaps, with a certain irritation in the tones of his voice, seemed to rouse Don Esteban into something more than ordinary activity, for he gathered himself up from his seat and proceeded lazily towards the kitchen to stimulate, by his presence, the lagging movements of the kitchen maid.

The priest took immediate advantage of his absence, and proceeded with a rapid but quiet step to the window, from which he cast an eager look up and down the street. There was nothing apparently important enough to attract his notice, for the loungers at the door had disappeared, and had made their way to the kitchen, where their attentions completely monopolizing the thoughts of the gay Jacinta, had been the cause of the delay in the preparation of the priest's chocolate. The only other tenants of the thoroughfare were some peasants, taking their tomatoes to market, and a man in a muleteer's dress, who was conducting to the river three remarkably fine mules in high condition. The priest seemed to watch him closely; and then, as he heard Don Esteban returning, retreated hastily to his seat, muttering to himself, 'That can't be the manand I am ruined for ever with the Cardinal if I make a blunder; but I must fish out of that stupid owl of a posadero, if he knows anything of him, for he is no member of my flock, or of this neighbourhood.'

The host returned, and was followed by Jacinta, bearing the chocolate. The damsel, confident in her beauty, seemed to have no fears of any reproaches for her delay, and by the coquettish curtsey which she dropped to the curé in presenting it, intimated distinctly enough that the admiration which she had excited in the kitchen, by no means indisposed her for admiration in the parlour.

Whatever reply her roguish glance might have received in the confessional, it awoke on the present occasion no sympathetic answer. On the contrary, the priest regarded her with a grave but a steady glance, and having slightly waved his hand, accompanied with a benedico te mi hija, accepted the chocolate. Jacinta seemed abashed by the holy father's eye, and, without exhibiting further giddiness, retired, and the curé and the host were once more left alone.

Don Jeronimo sipped for some time his chocolate in silence

The Boniface had lighted another cigarito.

The priest spoke at length, scarcely moving the cup from his lips, with his eyes half closed, and his words dropped lazily from his mouth, as if the exertion of utterance was great, and the subject one in which he took little interest.

'You are getting rich, Don Esteban.'

'Holy mother how can your reverence say that! Since the year of our Lord 1700, and the accession of Don Philip, this miserable

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kingdom of Spain has been the seat of almost perpetual war, and how can an innkeeper make money if there be no travellers?"

'Tut, tut, my good friend, you have had plenty of French officers passing backwards and forwards, and Spanish officers; and English

prisoners by the dozen.'

'Ah, senor curé, it sounds well, but "fine words butter no parsnips." These sort of customers are ruin to a posada. The soldiers are too strong to pay, and the prisoners too poor. Though I am an innkeeper, I am an old Christian; but though my blood is as blue as the Cids, I have scarcely a peseta. Madre de Dios! what made your reverence think I was rich?

'Why, those three fine mules that I see coming up the street there. They have been here for a week, and I doubted not they were yours.' 'Vaya! I wish they were, but I have no such luck;

they belong to that caballero who is leading them.'

'And who is he?' 'Que sé yo;' and Don Esteban moved uneasily in his seat, as if the very exertion of thinking who the stranger might be was too much for him.

'And what does he call himself?' said the persevering curé.

'Why, I believe he is in the arriero line, and wants to let his

mules to travellers.'

'If he has been here for a week, he must have had many opportunities.' 'That's possible; and, indeed, I recollect hearing say that the senoras up-stairs would have hired him, but he asked too high a price.'

The fellow must be well to do in the world; for his capa is of the newest, and his mules, though it's little that a churchman

knows of such matters, seem to be good.'

'Good, your reverence! They are the envy of every arriero that enters the stable; better were never sold at Astorga.' 'The fellow,' said the priest, 'appears to me to be something like a Gitáno.'

'No, no, a true Christian, Don Jeronimo; it was but yesterday I saw him stick his fork into a lump of pork from the puchero; by our Lady of Pilar he swallowed it up in a moment. No, no, a true

Christian, and no Jew.'

'You think, then, my worthy friend, Don Esteban, that those who are not Jews must be Christians,' said the priest, with a contemptuous smile; 'but if this fellow be no Gitáno by blood, he is a Gitáno at least by trade; for if your opinion be correct, no gipsy horse-dealer in Spain could have chosen better cattle. And how long is he going to remain here?'

'Ca, who knows! But, as your reverence says, he must be rich, for he does not spare the chopped straw or the barley; and so much the better for the posada,' continued the Boniface, with a grin. 'At the price he asks for his mules, he'll wait some time for a job.'

'You are fortunate, Don Esteban, in having such permanent customers. And the ladies upstairs, are they going to remain here long?'

By the law, you know (may my malediction be on it) they can

only remain three days, and they have been two already. But do you expect any one, Don Jeronimo? I cannot else think how you can take the trouble to inquire into other people's affairs. Do you expect any one, I say?' 'No, no, my worthy friend, a bad habit

and pure idleness. But who comes here?'

The priest's question was suggested by the well-known crack of a French postilion's whip, and, hurrying to the window, Don Jeronimo, whose curiosity appeared insatiable, beheld advancing at a rapid pace two horsemen. One was a traveller, the other a postilion from the French post-house. They made for the door of the inn, and as soon as they had reached it the former jumped from his steed, and having received a pair of small saddle-bags from his companion, paid and dismissed him. The post-boy and his horses immediately proceeded to retrace their steps towards Behobia. The traveller remained in the street and watched their progress, till they had got beyond the town and its lounging population. He then made his way into the stable, and with the air of one who well understood the character of the locality, mounted the staircase which led from it, and entered the room in which had taken place the conversation now related, and which was still tenanted by the master of the house and Don Jeronimo.

#### CHAPTER II.

#### THE CONTRABANDISTA.

THE new comer was a young man of about three and twenty. He was tall and well made, and with a face which, remarkably handsome, owed its charms less to the features, regular and classic though they were, than to its expression. There was a joyousness in the blue eye, and a humour about the mouth which irresistibly attracted the spectator, and which lost nothing of their power from the dare-devil recklessness that, on most occasions under control, still displayed itself at intervals in the confidence of the step, the motions of the body, or even when it was most gay in the glance of the bright eye. His hair was auburn, and was worn in natural curls, while a moustache of the same colour covered his upper lip.

He was dressed in a dark-blue velvet jacket which scarcely met in front, and was slashed at the elbows and wrists. The waistcoat was richly embroidered with gold thread, while a pair of short breeches of the same material as the jacket, open at the knees, and profusely ornamented there and up the sides with silver buttons dangling from short chains, completed the costume. Round his waist was a broad belt or sash of crimson silk, called a faja, while the loose collar of the shirt turned down, as we should say at the present day 'à la Byron,' was confined by a handkerchief of a showy French pattern, having its ends fastened in front by being passed through a seal ring. The lower part of his limbs was covered with jaunty leather gaiters, worked on the edges in Arabesque, and un-

buttoned towards the middle of the calf so as to display his stocking of fine material. Over the instep was buckled a pair of large spurs. On his head was a narrow-brimmed peaked hat of velvet, and in his sash the invariable navaja or knife. He carried in his left hand a short double-barrelled carbine, while his right supported his saddle-bags.

All this, which has taken us some time to describe, was gathered at a glance by the two inmates of the chamber. The traveller in the first instance had been apparently unaware of their existence, and had entered the room singing in a joyous tone, 'Yo qui soy contra-As soon, however, as he became conscious of their presence he flung down his saddle-bags, and sweeping the floor with his hat, he exclaimed in tones of the greatest politeness. 'Good morning, cavaliers; good morning to your reverence; good morning, Senor posadero.' The courtesy was eagerly returned, and the parties took a survey of each other. Upon the part of the innkeeper the investigation was slight, and the glance careless. On that of the priest the curiosity was more active, for though he endeavoured carefully to veil it from the observation of its object, he did not the less when he thought himself unremarked watch anxiously his looks, person, motions, and every word which fell 'Breakfast, my noble host, breakfast immediately,' from his lips. said the new comer. 'I've been a-foot since four o'clock, and am nigh famished.'

You forget, your worship,' said the innkeeper, 'that this is not a fonda but a posada; but I dare say Jacinta, if you supply her with

money, will find the necessary materials.'

The traveller awaited no further reply, but seemingly aware that if haste were his object he must superintend the preparations for the meal himself, walked off to the kitchen without another word, and in two minutes after Jacinta was seen to issue from the gateway on her road to the butcher's, the baker's, and the market-stalls at a pace whose unwonted speed argued that either the good looks of the stranger, or his money, had exercised their influence on the avarice or susceptibility of the kitchenmaid. The absence of the traveller was eagerly seized upon by the curé as an opportunity of ascertaining from the host his opinion with regard to the new arrival.

'Well, Don Esteban,' said he, pointing to the door of the apartment through which the new comer had just made his exit; 'what

do you think of him—what is he?'

- 'Does your reverence need to ask?' said the innkeeper, with something of astonishment in his tone. 'That dress tells its own story. The fellow is a regular majo; and who but a contrabandista can afford to dress in silks and velvets?'
  - 'Likely enough,' said the priest. 'But is he a Spaniard?'

'Not a doubt of it.'

'And from what part of the kingdom?' 'By his ruddy cheeks and his fair hair, from the Three Provinces.'

'He speaks Castilian like a Madrileno,' said the curé.

'Valgume Dios, that's natural. Cavaliers in the smuggling trade speak all the languages of Spain. They are constantly on the move, and know everything. But here he comes to answer for himself.'

The innkeeper was right. The traveller, who had apparently made the arrangements for his breakfast, now returned to the public room, and selecting from his pouch a Havannah eigar lighted it, and throwing himself on a bench commenced smoking with the air of one who was undertaking one of the important duties of the day.

The rich odour diffused itself over the chamber, and gradually

invaded the nostrils of the priest and the master of the house.

'Oh how delicious,' said the former, 'a puro, a perfect puro.'
The traveller took the hint.—'Pardon me, senors,' said he, 'I had forgotten;' and rising, he presented consecutively to the parties his tobacco-pouch. A present so highly valued was eagerly received, and the gratitude of the recipients attested by a profound obeisance. The puros were then lighted, and for some time the parties, abandoning themselves to the enjoyment of the rare luxury, smoked in silence.

'Yours is a happy trade, senor cavalier,' said the innkeeper, at length, 'which enables you to smoke such cigars. By our Lady of Pilar, it must be a jolly life; but I suppose that at the present your

worship has not been looking after the tobacco.'

'Senor posadero,' said the traveller, addressing the innkeeper, 'it is of no use attempting to conceal the matter from a person so quicksighted as you are. On the other side of the Bidassoa nobody guessed who I was. But no sooner have I entered the posada at Irun, than you find out at once that I am a contrabandista. Ah, what talent! this comes of birth—this comes of having noble blood.'

The innkeeper stroked his chin and his moustache with the air of one who has received a compliment, but feels that it is

deserved.

'But your worship also is no doubt noble. You, too, from your fair hair and bright colour, must be from the Three Provinces.'

'Perdone, senor,' said the traveller, with a laugh; 'excuse me if for the present I say nothing with regard to my residence or my birthplace. You know that caballeros in my profession are sometimes on bad terms with the king's officers.'

' Cu—there is no king here. Don Philip is only Lord of Biscay. We have our Fueros—we Basques—and don't trouble ourselves

about Customs or Excise.'

'True, my friend, but it may be that I am going as far as Aranda, or it may be to Madrid, and it might just be as well for my own safety that I should not communicate, even to a cavalier so worthy of confidence as yourself, my ordinary residence.'

'There is wisdom in your acts,' said the curé, taking for the first time a share in the conversation, 'for it is alleged that the Cardinal is no friend to the contraband trade. There have been, as I understand, some very severe edicts published lately with regard to gentlemen in your profession, and I think it possible that you may meet

with some trouble as soon as you get beyond Vittoria.'

'Vaya,' said the traveller, 'a man is only a contrabandista when he has forbidden goods in his pack. 'Till I get my cigars from Gibraltar, or my silks from Rousillon, I am but a gentleman at large, travelling for his pleasure, and in all things a faithful subject of His Majesty, Don Philip, whom the Holy Virgin preserve.'

'And where has your worship been lately?' said the priest.

'In Flanders, your reverence, and in France. The dames of the Prado are fond of Lyons silks and Mechlin laces, and he that would have doubloons in his pocket must provide them with both.'

'And what is the news, senor cavalier, in these countries?'

'None that would interest your reverence. The Regent gives good suppers in the Palais Royal, and the Duchess of Maine pleasant pic-nics at Sceaux; and it is whispered,' added he, with a laugh, 'that in neither the morning nor the evening festivities are the canons of the church sufficiently attended to.'

'But I spoke of wars and rumours of wars.'

'Not a whisper of either, your reverence. Indeed, how could they be looked for when the world is at present under the rule of the Church? Is not the Cardinal Alberoni prime minister of my sovereign lord, Don Philip? Is not Cardinal Dubois prime minister of His Majesty, Louis XV and the Duke Regent? Is not Cardinal Sala prime minister of the Emperor? With the world under the rule of the Church we must enjoy peace and tranquillity.'

The priest did not seem to relish much the compliment, which the history of the last five years had proved to be so totally undeserved. He dissembled, however, his vexation, and said in a

gaver tone than usual—

'You appear wondrously skilled, senor, in the affairs of the great world. One would say that you had played your part as a politico as well as a contrabandista.'

There was something in the tones of the priest's voice that seemed to attract the attention of the traveller, for he turned sharply round and fixed his eyes on the face of the ecclesiastic as if he would have read in the remark more than the words appeared to warrant. The perpetual smile, however, of the interrogator defied scrutiny.

'Ah, I wish I had such luck,' was the reply made at length, and in a joyous tone. 'Anything to win a peseta—but I fear I must content myself for the present with silks and laces—and here comes

Jacinta with my breakfast.'

The viands were placed on the table, and the traveller, after having given to his companions the customary invitation to join him, and received the customary thanks and refusal, proceeded to discuss the meal alone.

When it was over he inquired of the host if there were any muleteers waiting for a job. The innkeeper, upon whom the gift of the puro and the apparent wealth of the new arrival had produced a favourable impression, replied, as he had done to the priest, that the only muleteers in Irun had been already engaged to transport the two ladies above stairs with their servants to Madrid, and that though there were some other arrieros in the town, they were Maragatos, who conveyed heavy goods only, and at a slow pace. He added that there was still one person loitering about the inn, who was the master of three first-rate animals, but that his charges were so enormous that it was impossible for any one to form an engagement with him.

The smuggler seemed to prick up his ears at the character of the

mules.

'And the beasts are excellent?' said he. 'Finer, your worship, never were foaled.'

'I am in haste,' said the smuggler; 'I must have a talk with this

extravagant mulemaster of yours.'

'You have not far to seek him, for he spends three-fourths of the whole day leaning against the house at the corner of the street, and directly in front of the windows of the posada; and there,' continued he, as he advanced to the verandah, 'is the very man. I wish your worship success with him; but if he keeps up his price with you as with others, there is not a fair in Spain at which you could not buy the mules for half the money.'

The traveller scarcely listened to the observation of the host, but replacing his hat, and catching up his saddle-bags, he left the room, and moved down stairs in search of the individual in the street.

The innkeeper followed him as far as the kitchen, whither he had been attracted by curiosity, to learn the amount of money expended by Jacinta, and the curé was left the solitary tenant of the apartment.

'That fellow puzzles me,' said he to himself. 'What to write to the Cardinal, I know not. And then these ladies up-stairs who refuse to show themselves. And this fellow with his Gitáno look, and his mules (each handsome enough to serve the Archbishop of Toledo), who wishes to let them out for hire, and yet won't let them. By St. Isidro, I cannot help thinking that there is something brewing under all this mystery; but for the life of me I cannot guess its shape or object, and feel as thick-headed as if for the moment I had borrowed the upper story of that booby of an inn-keeper, Don Esteban.'

And Don Jeronimo placed himself in the corner of the room, and proceeded from his ambush to watch the muleteer who had been the object of his morning speculations, and the conference, which he anticipated was about to take place between him and the contra-

bandista.

#### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MULETEER.

The traveller pursued his way down stairs. He did not, however, as the priest had anticipated, go direct into the street. With all his seeming recklessness of manner, he had apparently been taught prudence by experience, for instead of making for the great door of the inn, he stopped at the foot of the stairs, and commenced casting upon either side of him a lazy glance at the horses and mules around him.

The stable is the entrance hall of the Spanish inns. Rarely possessing food for the traveller, and exhibiting in their bare walls and dirty and unfinished apartments the most perfect absence even of those more simple luxuries which can be found in England in the meanest alchouse, their accommodations for the four-legged visitants offer a strange contrast to those provided for their masters. The stables are always large, cool, and airy, and the chopped straw and barley, the invariable food in the Peninsula for beasts of all sorts intended for the road, abundant and of the best quality. The reason of this is simple enough. The higher classes travel little, and when they do move, have somewhat the appearance, and adopt the tactics of a small army on its march. The grandee and his family are accompanied by cooks, servants, proveditores, house-stewards, and market-men. They carry with them their provision in carts or on baggage mules. They have their wine, their hams, their sauces—while the coarser elements, such as poultry, partridges, flour, and liquor for their attendants, are purchased in any locality at which their halt may take place. Thus the innkeeper is called upon to provide them with nothing but shelter for the night, and his house degenerates into a caravanserai. Where the chances of profit are thus extremely rare, and very grudgingly paid, the landlord of the hostelry naturally falls back for support, and devotes his chief attention, to that class of customers which is the most numerous, and which, no small desideratum in a Spanish inn, gives the least trouble, the arrieros or muleteers.

The roads in Spain are for the most part execrably bad. The best which exist at the present day have been formed by the Bourbon dynasty: for the descendants of Louis XIV with the tenacity of race inherited the building, gardening, and road-making propensity of their ancestor. Yet even under their auspices the increased facilities in the communications were limited to the highways which led from the Capital to the northern and southern boundaries of the kingdom, to Bayonne and Seville; together with some three or four shorter routes varying in length from five miles to thirty, and connecting the Palace at Madrid with the royal country residences at the Pardo, at Aranjuez, and at the Escurial. But at the time at which our story commences, Philip V., the first of the Spanish Bourbons, had been but a few years on the throne, and his troubled reign had left him neither funds nor leisure for the

improvement of what have been termed 'the great arteries of commerce.' The northern portion of the kingdom was thus, except by the Pampeluna road, still impassable for wheel-carriages, and the traffic of the country was in a great measure conducted through the

medium of mules and their proprietors.

These were divided into two classes—those who transported merely passengers, and those who carried goods. The former, who affected a higher dignity, had mule-litters, in which the traveller was carried on his journey somewhat in the manner of a sedanchair, making allowance, of course, for some alteration in the shape of the vehicle; for the litter was long, and capable of containing two persons in a lounging attitude. These reclined facing each other, and were borne on their way by a couple of mules placed one before and one behind, and playing their part between the shafts which connected them with the carriage, much like a couple of chairmen. Each litter was accompanied by its proprietor and his servant, both also mounted upon animals, which relieved on alternate days those which supported the litter. Some half-dozen others were attached to the cavalcade, and carried the luggage and servants of the travellers. The mule-master himself, or the senor caballero, as he was termed, affected the dignity and wore the dress of a Spanish Don. Rigidly ceremonious to his employers, and claiming towards himself the same forms of politeness, with his broadbrimmed Spanish hat, his jerkin, faded cloak, and velvet breeches. peaked beard, and long rapier, he might have been mistaken for a portrait of Titian or Velasquez stepped out of its frame. But with all this, his dignity and his claim to noble blood did not prevent his having a sharp eye to his own interest; and though rigidly honest in the delivery of the property intrusted to him, animate or inanimate, he did not the less in making a bargain for its transference. insist upon the most extravagant sums which he thought it possible to extract from the haste or the wealthiness of his would-be employers.

The second and the more common class of arrieros, was composed of men who formed a very important part of the Spanish population. Chiefly from the neighbourhood of Astorga or the kingdom of Leon. and called by the general name of a community which seemed to have devoted themselves to the carrying trade from generation to generation, and from father to son—the Maragatos—they held in their hands almost the whole traffic of the country. Singularly brave, and honest to the extent of a farthing, they travelled like the Arabs of the desert in caravans. Each man had his half-dozen mules, their pack-saddles laden with goods, and was himself armed to the teeth with an escopeta, or firelock, in length and appearance much like a duck-gun, and in the use of which the tribe was proverbially skilful. The excellence of their weapons, their resolution, and the numbers in which they moved, enabled them to set at defiance the numerous bands of robbers who then, as always, infested the Spanish thoroughfares. The safety thus promised to merchan-

dise and travellers had given them a monopoly of public traffic, and not only was property almost invariably conveyed by them, but passengers who were not in a hurry, and who were disposed to tolerate their rude manners and the coarse accommodation of their resting-places, not unfrequently availed themselves of their animals and their protection.

Their importance, and the consciousness of it, had had its natural effect upon their manners. They were the lords of the road, and conducted themselves as if they knew it; for they were insolent and overbearing, and their long file of mules held the centre of the highway without turning aside for king or grandee. They formed, too, the most regular and most dearly-cherished customers of the innkeeper, who, in their behalf, laid aside his usual indolence and indifference, and eagerly exerted himself to find favour in the eyes of a community so jealous of its rights, and so disposed to avenge as an insult offered to the body, any slight exhibited to its individual members.

There was a third class which formed a sort of hybrid between the other two; that of men not belonging to the regular guild of carriers, and who having neither the wealth of the Maragatos, nor the pretensions of the hidalgo mule-master, had become the possessors of two or three Rosinante animals, and were anxious to turn them to profitable account by letting them out for hire. But they were but little in request, partly because the characters of the men themselves were generally suspicious, and partly because the beasts which they possessed were seldom in wind, limb, or condition, such as were calculated to tempt any travellers but those who from their poverty were willing to accept the smallness of the price charged as a compensation for the risk or the delay.

It was to this much-distrusted fraternity that belonged the muleteer, who had excited the suspicion of the priest, and whose animals had been the subject of the eulogium of Don Esteban. Possibly the remarks which had been made with regard to the extravagant price asked for their use, or possibly a desire to judge with his own eyes of excellences so vaunted, had excited the curiosity of the young traveller, for on reaching the foot of the stair, instead of making immediately his way to the door, as Don Jeronimo had expected, he stood still as we have already mentioned, and looked

round him.

The stable had but one occupant, an elderly man in a shabby doublet, and a rapier by his side, the point of which trailed upon the ground, and whose length would, if necessary, have made it no bad substitute for a spit. He was leaning against the wall with his arms folded, and looking the representation of morose dignity. But the young contrabandista knew well the talisman that opens Spanish hearts, for taking from his pouch one of those Havannahs which had excited the admiration of the curé, he advanced to him and presented it.

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Senor caballero,' said he, 'will you do me the honour to accept a

puro, and give me some information with regard to the best mode

of reaching Aranda?"

'I kiss your hands, senor,' said the venerable Don Quixote-looking figure in reply, 'and accept thankfully your magnificent present. As to the mode of travelling to Aranda, if your worship is in a hurry, that may be a matter of some difficulty. I myself should have been proud to convey so generous a cavalier, but my beasts are already engaged by two ladies and their servants, who are about to take their departure for Madrid, and the Maragatos probably travel too slowly to suit the taste of so distinguished a looking gentleman.'

'All the mules here are engaged then?'

'All, your worship—all except these,' continued he, as he lounged up the stable, pointing to three animals in the highest possible condition, and whose small heads, bright eyes, and clean limbs augured well for their spirit and capability of enduring work.

'These are fine mules, senor caballero,' said the traveller, 'and no doubt also are yours.' 'Not amiss,' said the noble muleteer, with

a patronising air, 'but they do not belong to me.'

'And who then may be the proprietor?' 'Sabe Dios—some

Don Fulano, I suppose—some Mr. what d'ye call him.'

'How deeply do I regret, senor, that they are not yours, that I might have hired them from you, but it may be that their owner may be disposed to let me have them.' 'Possibly, your worship, but they say that he asks more than double what I, a man with a coat of arms, and a hidalgo, would have been contented with.'

'What insolence!' said the traveller, with well-affected astonishment. 'But I must, nevertheless, go learn his price. Can you tell

me where he is to be found?'

'In the street, at the corner of the house opposite. You will know him by his zamarra. But as your worship has been generous enough to bestow upon me this most fragrant of Havannahs, and most worthy of a king's lips, I may hint to you that he is a man without a name, and your worship recollects the old proverb, "that nobody's friend is often the traveller's enemy." Your worship will understand me,' and the speaker, by a grim smile and a nod, gave emphasis to his language.

The traveller seemed to pause for a minute as if in doubt.

'Amiable cavalier,' said he, at length, 'I thank you for the hint; but you, if I may judge from the purity of your language,' taking off his hat in a low bow of compliment to his companion, 'are a Castilian. So am I, and when did a Castilian ever know fear? I must see this man, for I am in haste;' and with the words he left the stable, and proceeded to the other side of the street.

The muleteer had not stirred from the spot which he had occupied when first seen from the window. He was a man of about five-and-thirty, of a swarthy complexion, and spare make; but, from his breadth of shoulders and length of arm, seemingly of great muscular power. His hair was jet black, his nose slightly hooked, his lips thin; but the feature of his face which was the most remarkable

was the eye. It was not that it was either large or small, or that it possessed any peculiarity of shape or colour, but it had a fixed staring look, and was covered, when in repose, with a thin glaze, which seemed to emit a sort of phosphoric light. He was dressed in a jacket of black sheep-skin, called a zamarra, ornamented with silver tags, strapped closely round the body by a leathern girdle of great breadth, and fastened in front by an iron buckle. To this was attached a pouch of untanned moleskin, apparently intended to serve as a cartouche-box. On his lower limbs were breeches and leggings of brown cloth; while a broad-brimmed hat of coarse beaver covered his head.

The traveller made a low obeisance as he approached him. It was carelessly returned, and with the air of one who was indifferent to any offer which might be made to him, and was prepared in advance to anticipate that the negotiation would be without result.

'Senor caballero,' said the contrabandista, 'I am informed that

those three handsome mules in the stable are your property.'

'Your worship is right.' 'I would hire them.'

'Whither would your worship go?' 'I would engage them as far as Aranda del Duero; but my affairs may possibly call me to Madrid, and I should wish to have the power, if it were necessary, to carry them along with me. What is your charge?' 'Two dollars a-day for each of the mules, and as much for myself, with back-fare to Irun.'

'Two dollars a-day, and return-money besides!' said the traveller, in an accent of inexpressible astonishment. 'It is five times the amount of the sum usually asked.'

'If your worship does not like the price,' was the reply, in a tone of the greatest indifference, 'you are the master, you need not

pay it.'

'Eut, senor arriero, consider the matter.' 'I have considered it. Your worship is a contrabandista. The new laws of his Eminence the Cardinal are most severe, and if the king's officers think fit to suspect you of having in your alforjas any silks which have not paid duty, they may not only chance to seize you, but to take possession of my beasts, and I were a ruined man.'

'Well, my friend, there is something in what you say; and if I were disposed to give you the price, in what time would you undertake the journey to Madrid?' Your worship, now that I have

reconsidered the subject, I could not undertake it at all.'

' Es loco!' muttered to himself the traveller, in astonishment.

'No, your worship, I am not mad; but the mules are all I possess, and I should go mad if a Corregidor took a fancy to them, and chose, when he arrested you, to consider them as part and portion of your worship's property.'

The traveller attempted to remonstrate, but it was in vain; and he once more took his way to the door of the posada. He had half crossed the street when he heard a slight cough. He looked up, and saw in the balcony in front of one of the windows of the inn

two ladies, evidently the senoras spoken of by the innkeeper as

about to proceed to Madrid.

The elder, as far as could be judged, was a woman of about fifty. She was dressed in the costume of a duenna of the period. A circular toque, or small skull-cap, of black cloth, some four inches in diameter, and rising in the centre into a peak, covered the top of her head, and formed the framework, from which was suspended a voluminous mantilla of the same material. Her upper person was compressed by a pair of stays of black silk, of great size and length, laced in front, and retained in a proper state of rigidity by long and broad busks of steel; while below was a guard-infanta, or hoop of enormous circumference, descending to her feet, and which, from its dimensions, justified the doubts of the innkeeper whether it would be possible for her to make her way into the litter. The younger wore a small three-cornered hat, with plumes of feathers wreathed all round it; a short boddice with tight sleeves, and a skirt of the same colour and material such as that usually adopted at the time by Spanish women of rank when travelling or in the country.

Of the face of the elder dame it would be difficult to judge, except that, notwithstanding her age, her teeth were still fine, and her eyes, while they gave evidence of past, betrayed no indisposition to present coquetry. The younger had better claims to notice. She was a beautiful girl, of about nineteen, and scarcely above the middle size. Her face and person were alike cast in the happiest mould. The forehead was lofty and intelligent; the eyebrows like a mouse's tail; the nose small and finely chiselled about the nostril. The upper lip was short and curled, and the under portion of the face indicated a consciousness of self-possession, energy, and power. which not even the modesty or the perfectly feminine beauty of the features could altogether conceal. But if there was more mind in its expression than would have been in consonance with that mouton qui rêve look which is in some countries considered the perfection of female beauty, the fault was amply redeemed by the character of the large dark eyes which, now bright and now languishing, could not, even in repose, veil the fire and joyousness of their glance.

The traveller stood still in an instant, and, doffing his beaver, bowed to the ground with the profound respect due to so beautiful a vision. The bow was the lower, perhaps, from his having, for the moment, the vanity to suppose that the slight cough which first caught his ear had been intended for the special purpose of attracting his notice. If he entertained such a belief, however, he was doomed speedily to be disappointed, for the eyes of the elder lady were fixed steadily on the other side of the street; while, if the laughing glance of the younger were directed towards him, it was only for an instant, and her look, like that of her companion, took the direction

of the muleteer.

His ear, too, had caught the cough from the balcony, and upon him it seemed to produce a magic influence; for though he did not stir or change the lounging attitude which, with his arms folded, he had retained during the conference, he, by a side glance, watched

with breathless eagerness the motions of the senoras.

They were little complimentary to the cavalier in the street: for. so far from appearing gratified by his courtesy, the younger dame, without vouchsafing any notice of his presence, whispered some words in the ear of her companion. They seemed to intimate the propriety of retreating into the interior of the apartment, for the elder immediately retired. The girl prepared to follow her, but before she did so looked steadily at the muleteer, and drew her right hand slowly across her mouth. In another instant she, too, had disappeared, and the immediate closing of the window intimated to the contrabandista something like displeasure at the admiration testified by his manner and the profoundness of his obeisance. The traveller would have felt inconsolable had it not been that he fancied, that, even as she withdrew, the younger fair one had glanced at him a second time, and with ever which, ever powerful, seemed upon the present occasion to have a mockery and a meaning in their expression which were perfectly incomprehensible.

He was still standing in the street with his hat in his hand, and gazing at the closed window with somewhat of the look with which a fire-worshipper contemplates that portion of the heavens in which the sun has just set, when he was awakened from his dream of adoration by some one twitching him by the cloak. He turned round, and, to his astonishment, found that the person who wished to attract his attention was his statue-like companion of the corner of the street—the muleteer.

#### CHAPTER IV.

#### THE LADY TRAVELLERS.

THE few seconds which had elapsed seemed to have operated a wonderful change in the manners and demeanour of the muleteer. His lofty indifference to the offers made to him by the contrabandista, and the blunt and almost rude manner in which they were received had been entirely abandoned, and now with a voice almost quivering from eagerness he reopened the conference.

'I was wrong, your worship,' said he, 'I have reconsidered the

matter, I will accept your worship's offer.'

The contrabandista looked at him with something like astonishment.

'I, too, sir mule-master, have also reconsidered it, and I am not disposed to renew the extravagant terms which you thought fit to reject so contemptuously.'

'But what will your worship give me?' said the muletcer, eagerly. 'It has since occurred to me that I may get a good back

fare from Madrid, and it would suit me to accept any offer which

your worship may now be disposed to make me.

'Vaya,' said the traveller, with a smile, 'suppose it were only to be the regular fare of two pesetas a-day for each mule and as much for the muleteer?' 'It is a new bidding, your worship, and I take it.'

The traveller looked at him with something like surprise. A shade of suspicion passed across his face as if he were doubtful of the reasons which had effected so sudden a revolution, and he fixed his keen blue eye upon his companion like one who would have read a hidden purpose. If any existed, however, there was no evidence of it in the face of the arriero. His short-lived agitation had disappeared. He had recovered his composure, and his features once more exhibited the same calmness which they had originally presented. Their expression seemed to decide the contrabandista.

'Is it then a bargain?' said he. 'For two pesetas a-day for each of the mules, and as much more for yourself, am I to have the animals to Aranda del Duero, or, if I please, to Madrid?' 'Your lordship is the master. It is a bargain for two pesetas a-day each.'

'When will you be ready to start?'

'When your worship pleases. The beasts have been in the stable a week, and would be all the better for having their legs stretched.'

'Be ready then in an hour.'

'Your worship shall be obeyed. The mules shall be ready, and you will not regret having hired them. The senor,' continued he, with a smile, 'is a contrabandista, and may not choose to have a conference with the king's officers. If such be the case, have no fear upon that head, for there is not a nag in the Three Provinces or in Castile that will touch them in the long gallop. I'll warrant your honour a safe arrival at Madrid.'

The words were simple, but they seemed to the traveller to contain a deeper meaning than met the ear, and again he fixed his keen eyes on his future guide, but, as before, the bronzed face told no tales, and if there were a hidden sense in the language, the expression in the countenance of the speaker gave no evidence of it.

'Pshaw!' said the young cavalier to himself. 'It were losing time to speculate upon this fellow's intentions. If I see aught like treachery, I will shoot him as I would a dog. My hand, thanks to the fates, is a pretty steady one, and come what may, his beasts deserve his boast, and there is nothing on the road likely to lay finger on my shoulder so long as I have bridle in hand and foot in stirrup.'

With these words he reiterated his instructions to his guide to have everything ready for his departure in an hour, and re-entered the posada.

He found the public room, as before, occupied by the priest. The innkeeper was not visible, and the curé had taken advantage of his absence to watch eagerly the scene which we have recorded, as far at least as regards the two male actors. The ladies, as being in a room overhead, had, of course, not come within the sphere of his observation, but he had guessed even at their presence, for his quick

eye had noted the profoundness of the obeisance of the young traveller, and had judged from the way in which the hat had been raised, and the expression of adoration which accompanied the courtesy, that some of the fair sex had mingled in the comedy. Still, with all his quickness of perception he had been unable to guess accurately at the result, and it was therefore with a burst of konest curiosity that he welcomed the reappearance of the contrabandista.

'Well, senor caballero,' said he, 'what news? Has this extravagant fellow of a muleteer consented to let you have on hire his beasts?'

'Thanks to the Virgin he has,' was the reply, 'and in an hour I start for Tolosa.'

'Your worship is joking.' 'I speak the truth,' said the contrabandista; 'but I must go and see if Jacinta can get me some provisions for the road.' And with the air of one who declined further conversation, he made his way to the kitchen.

As he moved along the passage he caught a glimpse of his guide retreating down the stair. But he had scarce time to speculate upon his appearance there, for the host entered on the instant, and informed him that the two ladies, who had been for some days his guests, had instructed him to announce that, if the senor caballero were not engaged, they were anxious to converse with him on matters of importance. Surprised as he was at the request, so gallant a cavalier had nothing for it but to obey, and intimating his acqui-

escence by a nod, he followed his conductor.

He found the ladies in the bedchamber, from the window of which they had shown themselves to him in the street. They stood in the centre of the apartment, while some four feet behind their respective mistresses were an old gentleman usher and an equally antique waiting-maid. The ladies curtsied to the ground as the traveller entered, while the domestics honoured his presence with an obeisance equally profound. All four then drew themselves up to their full height, and awaited with the rigidity of statues the courtesies with which the young cavalier acknowledged the politeness of the senoras. He bowed first to the elderly dame, with a hat that almost swept the floor. An obeisance still lower proclaimed his devotion to the charms of the younger. A third bow addressed to the whole party, and of an equally respectful character, accompanied by a los pies de usted, 'I throw myself at your feet, ladies,' terminated the forms of politeness, which the manners of the day required; and all five, the hostesses and the visitor, regained once more their perpendicular.

'Sir cavalier,' said the elderly lady, 'we are informed that you are about to take your departure for Madrid.' 'My movements are uncertain, senora,' was the reply. 'I have hired mules only to

Aranda del Duero.'

'It matters not, senor. It is the mountains of Guipuscoa and Alava which are dangerous. We fear them, and ere we depart for the capital, would fain secure to ourselves the protection of so gallant a cavalier.' 'Senora,' said the traveller, with embarrassment,

'I fear that I must, however, unwillingly, refuse your request. I travel on matters of importance, and my time is not my own. I must move at a pace which would inconvenience you and the senorita.'

'We cannot,' said the elderly lady, with a half smile, 'allow you to escape upon such a pretext. The mules which we have secured for ourselves are able to perform the journey with speed equal to

any, and we feel that our presence will not cause you delay.

The traveller hesitated as if in indecision. 'Madam,' said he, at length, 'I fear, with what pain to myself I need not say, I must decline an office, which, at other times, would confer upon me so much honour and pleasure. Your ladyship,' continued he, with a glance at his dress, 'may partly suspect my profession. In the contraband trade the speculations are sometimes large and important. They are so in my case. I am sent to superintend them. In justice to my employers they must be my first object, and I must refuse

you, for I am not my own master.

'You say right, senor,' said the elder of the two dames, repeating his words. 'You are not your own master, for no man is entitled to think of the interests of his own sex when called on to obey the wishes and guard the safety of ours. We, too, travel on matters of importance, and are anxious to gain Madrid without a moment's delay. But we learn that the Bandoleros are out in force, and dare not undertake the journey alone. We have waited in the posada, in the hope of obtaining the escort and protection of a gallant cavalier. The Virgin has sent you to our aid, and you will not desert us in our difficulty.'

The young traveller played with the brim of his hat, as if uncer-

tain what to say or do.

The elder lady remarked his hesitation. 'Come,' said she to her companion. 'Come, Donna Teresa, add your prayers to mine. It may be that the senor will be persuaded by you not to desert us.'

I can scarce hope,' said the girl, while she fixed her large liquid eyes on the traveller, with a glance that belied her words, 'that any entreaties of mine will avail, when yours have failed. Yet I would say that our business is urgent, and that much depends upon our speed, and grateful should we feel, most grateful,' continued she, resting strong emphasis on the words, 'if he would aid us in our extremity.'

The traveller continued to play with his hat.

'Senoras,' said he, at length, 'be it so. I am in your hands, and will do my best to protect you. But the sacrifice is no small one,

for I risk life and character by the delay.'

'Senor caballero,' said the vounger lady, with a look that marked her pleasure at having gained her point, 'we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You have decided well, and it is possible we may be able to repay the obligation, and fear not that we shall delay you on the road, for our mules are excellent, and you have nothing to apprehend from our want of power of enduring the fatigue: When do you start?' 'I had proposed, ladies, moving in an hour.'

'In an hour, then, we shall be ready to attend you; and now, sir cavalier, we must for the moment bid you adieu, and commence our

preparations.'

At eight o'clock in the morning, the main street of Irun presented a busy sight. In front of the posada was arranged the equipage of the travellers. There were two litters, each supported by a couple of mules, intended for the reception of the females of the cortège. Four more were loaded with their baggage. A fifth was intended for the conveyance of their venerable major-domo. By their side was the unknown muleteer, with his animals prepared for the journey; that which was to be assigned to the young traveller, being provided with an albarda or heavy-peaked saddle and broad slipper stirrups, then, as now, an inheritance from the Moors. On the third, or baggage-mule, were fastened the valise of the contrabandista, and his plaid or blanket of striped woollen, together with the spare clothing of the muleteer, and sundry hams, cheeses, and other supplies for the road, procured through the agency of the zealous Jacinta.

The party seemed well protected. The master-muleteer, and the servant attached to each litter, as well as those in charge of the baggage-mules, each carried an escopeta upon their shoulders, while the traveller himself, in addition to the *retajo*, or short blunderbuss, the invariable accompaniment of his caste, had in his waist shawl, what was more rare, a pair of double-barrelled pistols, seemingly of

English manufacture.

At the appointed moment, the ladies descended to the street. The duenna and her charge entered the first litter. The aged waiting-maid, with some packages of delicate female head gear occupied the second. The traveller and gentleman usher then took their places. The mozos rode up to the leading mules of their respective vehicles, and laid hold of the rein which was to conduct them. The impoverished Don-like figure, who was the chief of the caravan, raised himself in his stirrups to see that all was right. Everything was in its place. The innkeeper took off his hat and bowed. The hidalgo proprietor cried arrhé! and the whole party moved off at a pace which seemed to intimate that the pledge of the duenna would be kept, and that the speed of the young contrabandista would not be delayed by the companionship of the fair dames who had thus forced themselves upon his care.

Scarcely were they gone when the curé hurried to the window, and eagerly marked their progress, till the turn of the street hid

them from his sight. His look was puzzled.

'I must go,' muttered he to himself, 'and make up another despatch to the cardinal; but I doubt if I secure my promised canonry at St. Jago by anything that I can tell him of this day's work. An Englishman, forsooth! That fellow may be the man they want, for he has fair hair and blue eyes. But if he be an English-

man, he must be in league with the devil, for he speaks Castilian as if he had never been out of sight of the Puerta del Sol, and arranges the folds of his capa with as knowing an air as any majo in Andalusia.'

#### CHAPTER V

#### CHARLES CLIFFORD.

THE suspicion of the priest, extravagant and incredible as it appeared even to himself, was, nevertheless, correct. The traveller was an Englishman, and the mission upon which he was engaged was precisely that which it was the wish and interest of Cardinal Alberoni to baffle.

It has been already mentioned in the introductory chapter that it had been decided by France and England that there was little hope of giving permanent tranquillity to Europe till they had succeeded

in removing the priestly prime minister of Spain.

The project was excellent; the only difficulty was in carrying it into effect. Alberoni had for five years been the real ruler of the Spanish monarchy. From the fascination of his manners and the power of his mind he had obtained complete control over the king; while his influence with the queen was still more unquestionable, from his being a countryman of her own, and one of the few to whom, amid the hatred borne her by her Spanish subjects, she could look for aid in the plans she had formed for the aggrandisement of her children at the expense of the heir to the crown. To attempt to offer open opposition to a man so firmly established would have been idle. It was determined, therefore, to attack him in a more unexpected fashion, by taking advantage of the weaknesses of the two royal personages on whom the minister was dependent.

The besetting sin of Philip was bigotry—that of the queen ambition. It was hoped that influence might be obtained over the mind of the former through his spiritual director, the Jesuit D'Aubenton. Alberoni had promised a Cardinal's hat to the royal confessor. He had not kept his word; and it was understood that the treachery of the minister rankled in the mind of the priest. To him, therefore, letters of recommendation for the future Envoy were obtained from the General of his Order, Father Le Tournemine, at that time in Paris. As to the queen, the mode in which the allies expected to obtain her support was more simple. The Duke of Parma was her uncle. He had no children; and as it was understood that he intended to leave his States to the offspring of his niece, he had naturally the greatest influence with his royal relative. To him were intimated the wishes of the allied powers for the fall of the Cardinal-Minister, and his aid demanded. The duke hesitated. The result was that Austria (for that power had secretly joined the league) threatened to absorb his little sovereignty. To resist his colossal neighbour was impossible. The heir of the

Farnese yielded to the menace, and wrote a letter to his niece requesting her attention to the propositions of the secret envoy. Another was addressed by the prince to the Marquis Scotti, his ambassador at Madrid, instructing him to facilitate in every way the audience, or rather the private interview, at which the missive to Elizabeth Farnese was to be presented. Both the precious documents were then sent to Paris, and placed at the disposition of the ambassador of England, Lord Stanhope, and Dubois, the Prime Minister of Philip Duke of Orleans, the Regent of France, and wielder

of the power of that monarchy.

So far things went well. The allies had procured the tools for working the mine. What was still wanting was an agent to use them, efficiently, and on the spot. Yet to find one qualified for the post was not easy. For years had Spain been in hostility with France and England. A truce, some three months old, had no doubt for the moment arrested warlike operations; but the feeling on either side of the Pyrenees was still hostile; and any subject of the English or French crowns who might make his appearance at Madrid would, even if permitted to remain there, be so closely watched by the spies of the Cardinal, as to render his success as a political agent hopeless. To intrust the intrigue to a Spaniard was. of course, out of the question; and yet to give it any chance of a happy issue, it would be necessary to place it in the hands of some one who could escape notice by being mistaken for an inhabitant of the Peninsula.

Such was the result of the many conversations between Lord Stanhope and the Cardinal Dubois. It was in vain that they cast their eyes upon the most distinguished diplomatists of their respective kingdoms. They were too well known to be employed secretly. What they wanted was a man who had not only talent of a high order and courage to undertake a dangerous enterprise, but an acquaintance with the Spanish language, intimate enough to enable him to assume without suspicion the character of a denizen of the country which he was about to visit. Above all, he was required to possess a person so little known to fame as to avoid attracting the observation of the thousand lynx-eyed satellites of the private police of the Cardinal-Minister, who, as a matter of course, were familiar with the appearance even of the subordinate diplomatic agents of either Government. After a long search the discovery of such a representative seemed hopeless. The matter was about to be given up in despair, when a powerful ally behind the scenes suggested the appointment of a young man of three-andtwenty, of the name of Charles Clifford.

Clifford's father had been in his youth the secretary of the English embassy at Madrid. It was in the time of Charles II., the imbecile termination of a great race. The half-idiot sovereign had been married in the year 1678 to a daughter of France, the Princess Elizabeth. Among the maids of honour who formed part of the new Court was a Blanche de Zuniga, a daughter of the Duke of Béjar, the head of one of the most distinguished of the Spanish families. The young lady was thrown much into the society of the English secretary. A mutual attachment was formed, and they married. No opposition was offered to the match, for Clifford was the younger son of a Catholic peer, and no difference of religion, which would otherwise have formed an insurmountable barrier, opposed their union. Both, no doubt, were poor; but in the latter part of the seventeenth century Spain was a cheap country—the income of the government official, insignificant as it would have been in St. James's-square, had a respectable appearance when converted into Spanish currency, and the economical habits of the bride made it sufficient for their wants.

The marriage was a happy one, and its issue two sons and four daughters. The youngest of the family was Charles Clifford. He has been already introduced to our readers as the contrabandista of the inn at Irun; and it was while he was yet a child that took place the death of the last Spanish sovereign of the house of Austria. The War of the Succession followed, and brought misfortune to the allies and to Mr. Clifford. He had followed the English army as Political Agent, and with many of his countrymen, was taken prisoner at the disastrous battle of Almanza, and committed to a dungeon.

During the continuance of the struggle his wife and children had remained in the neighbourhood of Madrid, and undisturbed: partly because in a country where popular opinion was much divided, and the chances of the rival candidates equally balanced, it was considered dangerous to molest one who, in the event of the success of the house of Austria, would have such ample means of repaying the injury, and partly from the fact that Mrs. Clifford's brother, the Duke of Béjar, had been a zealous supporter of the successful candidate for the crown, and of course enjoyed no small influence with the Princess of Ursins. Mrs. Clifford, too, had chanced to make the acquaintance and acquire the friendship of the all-powerful court favourite, and with her the sorrowing wife now interceded to alleviate her husband's captivity.

She was successful. The English official received his liberty n parole, but as the Camerera Mayor feared the jealousy of the Court and the French party, it was accompanied by an order that Mr. Clifford, with his family, should live at a distance from Madrid, and carefully conceal the kindly feeling to his wife of the Spanish female prime minister. The conditions were thankfully accepted. The Cliffords took up their residence in La Mancha, and there, supported partly by remittances from England, and partly from their Spanish connections, they watched with interest, but without interference, the changing fortunes of the War of the Succession.

It terminated at length. By the peace of 1712 the disputed throne was conceded to the French prince, and Mr. Clifford was free. Strange to say, he did not avail himself of his emancipation. He had been so long in Spain that he had become attached to the

people and to their mode of life. The prejudices of his wife in favour of the Peninsula, were, of course, still more decided, but even her feelings yielded in intensity to those of her children. The young folks had indeed inherited the English tongue from their father, but they were Spanish in habits and associations, and always wore the dress and spoke the language of their adopted country.

Their education, notwithstanding the apparent isolation of their existence, had not been neglected, for Mr. Clifford was an accomplished man, and devoted his whole time to the instruction of his family. On occasions, too, he was able to give them more varied information than the mere theories of the schoolmaster can supply. The Princess of Ursins had forbidden their appearance at Madrid, but only during the residence of the Court. The six summer months were, according to the unvarying rule of Spanish etiquette, spent by the royal family at Aranjuez, and in their absence the Cliffords were admitted to the capital. The boon was eagerly taken advantage of; and the young folks, under the guidance of their father, and in addition to the ordinary branches of juvenile study. acquired a knowledge of architecture, painting, and sculpture, in a city which at the time possessed finer specimens of the arts than any other upon earth. Such was the mode in which were consumed their more serious hours. Their leisure moments were employed by the two young men in that, to youth, most interesting of occupations, exploring the streets and mixing with the population of a great town, and not unfrequently, in the whim of the moment, assuming the dress and affecting the manners of its motley-coloured inhabitants. Three summers had thus been spent, and at their close Charles Clifford and his brother were as well acquainted with every lane of the Spanish metropolis as any lounger of the Puerta del Sol.

It was at this time, when the youngest son was about nineteen, that an accident occurred which changed the residence of the family. Mr. Clifford's father, and shortly afterwards, his elder brother died. He became thus the inheritor of the family honours. He returned to England, and thither accompanied him the Manola nurse of his children, and her brother, the major-domo of his limited household.

With his new rank arose new prospects for his children. Lord Clifford's family was ancient. Though poor, its influence was considerable, and the new peer, from his captivity in Spain, had a claim upon the minister. For his eldest son, the heir to the peerage, no profession was required, and Lord Clifford devoted all his interest to the advancement of the younger. Charles Clifford got a commission in the Life-Guards. In these days commissions were easily bestowed, and promotion rapid, when rank and interest backed the candidate. At three and twenty the young man was a lieutenant-colonel. Still he was little separated from his family. Lord Clifford lived in London, where Spanish, from old habit, was the language of the young people, who still continued to amuse themselves in

moments of gaiety by masking themselves in the Spanish dress, and delighting the ears of their nurse and their aged servitor by the

purest Castilian.

It was at this time that Clifford unexpectedly received an order from the commander-in-chief to doff his uniform and proceed immediately to Paris. No reasons were assigned to him for his sudden journey, nor was he permitted to give any further information to his family than that the king required his services elsewhere than in London. In other respects the orders given him were definite enough. He was instructed to call himself Jones, to proceed to a certain house in a certain street in the French metropolis, where he was to hold himself secluded, not only from his countrymen in Paris, but from the British Embassy.

He obeyed. On the third night after his arrival, a carriage was heard to stop in the street below, and two individuals wrapped in large mantles entered the room. The cloaks were thrown aside, and in one of his unexpected guests, the young life-guardsman recognised Lord Stanhope. The other was announced to him as the Cardinal Dubois, the Prime Minister of France, and of the Regent Orleans.

The young officer underwent a rigorous examination. His acquaintance with history, with politics, with Madrid, with the Spanish and French languages, were all carefully canvassed in turn. For the most part the questions were put by his countryman, while the French Minister confined himself in a great measure to fixing on him his keen cat-like glance, and noting with the quickness of thought his answers, his manner, his look, his person.

The examination was long, but was apparently satisfactory. When it was over, the two diplomatists retired to a corner of the

room.

'Well, your Eminence,' said the English Minister, 'what do you

think of our young goshawk? Will it be safe to fly him?

'It will. The fellow has a head upon his shoulders. Besides, he is as cool as a cucumber, and I should think with pluck enough to take the devil by the throat, and I know,' said the dissolute priest, with one of his usual leers, 'if I were his satanic majesty, I should be right sorry to stand the tussle. And then he has the diplomatic accomplishments. His French might do for a member of the Academy. What say you to his Spanish? for if I recollect,' said he, with a side laugh, and a nudge of the elbow, 'the Duke of Vendôme at Villa Viciosa gave you an opportunity of becoming a judge of the language.'

'Your Eminence is cruel,' said Stanhope, in reply, 'to allude to my little misfortune; but I did my best to profit by it, and I flatter myself I am a judge of the Spanish. That young fellow,' continued he, pointing over his shoulder at Clifford, 'can patter Castilian as well as if he had never stirred beyond the mud walls of that the

most melancholy and unsupper-giving of capitals.'

'Ah, for bon vivants, like your lordship, I can conceive no residence more dreadful than a country, where, as the old proverb goes, you

will find a thousand priests, and not one cook. Certes! if you ever have hesitated about forgiving Vendôme for your captivity, his shutting you up in a place where that horrid mess Gazpacho is considered a delicacy, would be sufficient to excuse your vindictiveness. But to business. I think the fellow will do. However, before we decide, a friend of ours, who shall be nameless, must see him.' 'It would, methinks, be time lost, and worse than lost.'

'Faith, my lord, we can't help ourselves. The old jade will have a finger in every dish. I know her well, and if we do not allow her to help in the making, she is sure to spoil the pudding, and she

insists upon seeing the fellow.'

'Well, if it must be so, it must; but between ourselves, what with the Duchess of Kendal in England, and Madame Parabere here, I had rather that the petticoats kept themselves to their own vocation.' 'Pooh, pooh, my lord, you are too hard upon the sex. Politics would go on ill without them. At least, so says the Regent; though I confess that he generally chooses his Egerias some forty years younger than the ancient Jezebel, who has thought fit to thrust herself upon our counsels.'

'Get quit of her then.' 'Impossible—I dare not risk it. She is a perfect devil incarnate if thwarted, and she will mar if she can't

make.'

'What does your Eminence propose then?' 'She must see him to-morrow night; and, as it might excite suspicion if the Minister of France and the Ambassador of England were often together, I will not ask the favour of your lordship's company, but will conduct

him myself.' 'So be it then.'

The above conversation had been unheard by Clifford. All that transpired from it was the result. The young soldier was ordered to hold himself in readiness the following night at ten o'clock. At that hour the Cardinal Dubois entered his room, enveloped as before in a cloak, and bearing another of a precisely similar description upon his arm. In this Clifford was instructed to wrap himself, and the two, as soon as the disguise had been put on, descended to the street. A plain dark carriage, with coachman, but without lacqueys, awaited them. As soon as they had entered it, it started at a rapid pace, and after half-an-hour's locomotion, stopped in front of a shabby house in a gloomy and dirty street. Here Dubois descended, ordering Clifford to follow him. The Cardinal opened the door by a key he produced from his pocket, and closing it carefully after the admission of himself and companion, proceeded up stairs. A second key gave them admission into apartments upon the third floor, which were at the back of the building, and probably looked upon a garden. The second portal was closed as carefully as the first, and the parties moving across a narrow lobby, found themselves in a room at the farther end of it. It was of no great size, plainly furnished, but lavishly provided with wax tapers. At one side, and leading into an adjoining chamber, was another door. It was open, and the space which it had left vacant was covered nearly to the top with an Indian screen. The room beyond, however, was in total darkness.

The Cardinal placed the young soldier in the centre of the principal apartment, where the lights brought his person into strong relief; and with instructions to him not to move, went out. Shortly after, there was a whispering heard behind the screen, and Clifford thought he could distinguish the tones of a woman's voice. Dubois then returned, and proceeded to put the young soldier through what appeared somewhat like a military drill. He made him face the screen, then turn to it first one profile, then another. Then followed instructions to him to sit down, to rise up, to walk, to take his hat off, to put his hat on. The conversation during all this time had been carried on in French, when a white handkerchief was thrown over the top of the screen. It was apparently a signal, for the Cardinal immediately ordered Clifford to answer his questions in Spanish. After awhile, a black handkerchief replaced the white one.

It terminated the strange interview.

The Cardinal immediately retired, taking his young companion with him, and returned to Clifford's lodgings. On the following day, Lord Stauhope and Dubois entered his chamber, and informed him that he had been selected to overturn Alberoni's ministry. He was impressed with the necessity of preserving his incognito, and permitted to select the costume which he thought best calculated for that purpose. He fixed upon the disguise with which he was most familiar—that of the Andalusian majo, or coxcomb, the favourite garb of the Spanish smugglers, and worn by the more foppish of the population of all ranks when on a freak. He was informed that he would find such a dress in a small house in St. Jean de Luz, where he was ordered to pass the night before entering Spain. He was further instructed, on gaining Madrid, to make his way to the Calle de la Cabeza, a retired street in the centre of the city, where was resident a dependent of the English Government, and where he would find not only safe quarters, but trusty subordinates, and every variety of costume, should prudence, or necessity, make a change of dress necessary. Full instructions were then given to him for his political conduct, together with bills on England signed by Lord Stanhope for fifty thousand crowns. Letters of credence were added, together with the various packets intended for the Queen, D'Aubenton, and Scotti. All was now ready, and four days afterwards (for apparently some delay had occurred in the interval) he started on his journey. He arrived safely at St. Jean de Luz, found the promised dress with the arms which usually accompanied it, waiting for him, and, as our readers are aware, entered as a contrabandista the posada at Irun.

With this explanation we resume our story.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE JOURNEY.

AFTER leaving Irun, the litters and their attendants proceeded at a rapid pace. Indeed, though the road was little calculated for wheel-carriages, its inequalities seemed in no degree to affect the sure-footed mules, which moved on with a speed that could not have been anticipated by those who, for the first time, saw the clumsy conveyances they carried on their backs.

Behind, and at some distance, came Clifford and his guide.

'Well,' muttered he to himself, 'if this pace holds, I shall have nothing to regret in having become a squire of dames. And yet, considering the mission on which I am employed, it was folly, and worse than folly, to have encumbered myself with these two women. I wonder what their names are, or who is this mysterious guide of mine, with a face between a Jew and a gipsy's, who refuses crowns and takes pesetas.'

With the words he summoned his attendant to his side.

'Senor caballero,' said Clifford, 'by what name have I the honour

to address you?' 'Perez, your worship.'

'And how do you generally employ yourself?' 'I am but commencing life, your worship; and having saved some money, I bought these mules, and have started as an arriero.'

'And how long, senor caballero, have you followed the trade?'

'This is my fourth journey.'

'You know the road, then, well to Madrid?' 'Every inch of it.'

'And do you think there is any reason for the fears expressed by the ladies in the litter?'

'As to what, your worship?' 'As to the robbers on the road.'

'Why, as to that, senor, the general report goes that the bandoleros are out in force. It is scarce three months since the war was over, and as there are not a few disbanded soldiers, it is likely enough they have taken to levying contributions on their own account, and we shall scarce reach Madrid without meeting them. Your worship, as a contrabandista, is no doubt well able to handle the retajo, and ere long you may be called on to prove your skill.'

'And you, what can you do in such an emergency?'

'I,' said the guide, putting his finger upon a long gun, which hung suspended by his side, and was generally known by the name of an escopeta, 'I handle this not amiss.'

'And what are we to expect from the escort of the senoras?'

'Just nothing, your worship. As for the mozos, or mule lads, they make it a rule never to resist; and as to that old fool in the rusty velvet doublet and long sword, who says his blood is as blue as any in Castile, he will talk big till the moment comes; but as soon as the bandoleros call out their usual "boca à tierra," you will see his worship's nose as deep in the dust as ever yet was that of any man who fell into the hands of the gentlemen of the road.'

'Pleasant intelligence this,' said Clifford to himself, as he pushed

ahead of his companion. 'So it seems we are to have a skirmish, and I, as if I had not sufficiently important business on my shoulders, must needs encumber myself with the protection of a party that can neither fight nor fly. Ah! Charles Clifford, Charles Clifford—if Lord Stanhope and Dubois could have guessed that you were so easily led astray by a pair of bright eyes, they never would have sent you on a special mission to Madrid.'

His regrets were interrupted. The cavalcade in front had reached the foot of the hill which leads to Ernani, and the mules necessarily relaxed their pace. The elder of the ladies seemed disposed to take advantage of the opportunity of increasing her acquaintance with the young man she had pressed into her service, for as the litter slowly wound its way up the steep ascent, the large toque was seen to project from its side, and the bright-eyed duenna, with her hand-kerchief, intimated to Clifford her wish to address him. The young soldier had nothing for it but to comply, and touching his mule with the spur, the spirited animal soon placed him by the side of the litter.

'Senor contrabandista,' said the duenna, in a voice which, notwithstanding the fifty years of the owner, sounded melodious in the ears of the young Englishman, 'I trust you see that we are about to keep our word, and that, however anxious you may be to reach Madrid, we are little likely to detain you on your journey. And now, senor, you will allow me to explain to you the reasons for our anxiety to reach the capital without delay. The grandfather of my charge is a rich burgess of Madrid, and is ill, and he has sent for his grandchild to see her before he dies. With the old man's name I will not acquaint you. The senor is aware that sometimes, for family reasons, these are matters which it is necessary to conceal. Upon such subjects, therefore, your worship will be too discreet to ask questions, but I may mention, that my child has been for some time resident at Paris, though in the strictest seclusion, and as the senor has been gallant enough to grant two poor women his protection. I will allow her to converse with so accomplished a cavalier, for no doubt a gentleman, in the profession of a contrabandista, is well acquainted with matters on both sides the Pyrenees.'

To this discourse Clifford gave but little attention. The curtains of the litter had been drawn back, and during the oration of the duenna, his eyes had been fixed upon her companion. The young lady had none of the awkwardness of a girl who had just issued from a convent. On the contrary, there was, in her manner, expression, and movement, the self-possession of one who had mixed much and often in society. This, in itself, was little remarkable, and might not have attracted, on the part of the traveller, more than passing observation; but what did strike him as extraordinary was, that in the glance of the bright eyes, which from time to time met his, and in the smile of the beautiful mouth, there was an expression of meaning and intelligence which evidently spoke larger acquaintance with the world than the professions of the duenna would have led

him to suppose. There was evidently a mystery—what it was puzzled him. Sometimes the distinguished manners of both ladies (and no one was better able than Clifford, familiar as he was with the best society, to note them) led him to believe that they belonged to a class very different from that which they professed. Sometimes his suspicions were even more extravagant. It seemed to him, occasionally, that if he had not been able to read the disguise of his companions, the younger dame at least had been more fortunate in solving his; for when, the better to play his assumed character, he adopted the phraseology of his class, or detailed at length his purchases and his profits, he was met by an expression of saucy incredulity which excited in his mind the strongest doubts as to his having efficiently supported his incognito. The thought of having been discovered, to the last degree irritated him.

"Pshaw!' said he; 'a diplomatist, indeed, when I am puzzled at the commencement of my new career by an old woman and a silly girl. I must find out who they are: I must discover if they suspect

that I am anything but a contrabandista.'

The resolution was an excellent one, but he was not the more successful in carrying it into effect. And yet it was from no want of opportunity. The old dame seemed to use her duenna authority with little severity, or, to speak more correctly, appeared to give every encouragement to the intercourse between her ward and the young soldier. On the level ground, indeed, the travellers proceeded at a pace which rendered conversation impossible; but there were, nevertheless, many opportunities of carrying it on. The road from Irun to Vittoria is, to the last degree, undulating. It crosses for many a long mile the broken country which forms the provinces of Alava and Guipuscoa; and as the narrow highway wound up or down the steep mountain ranges, the slow pace of the litter enabled Clifford to attach himself to its side, and to hold long and undisturbed conversation with its fair inmate.

Besides which other occasions were not wanting. At night, indeed, when arrived at the inn which was to form their resting-place, the ladies at once retired to their bed-rooms, as, for the most part, the only public apartment was the kitchen, common alike to beggar and grandee; and where the coarseness of the jokes and language rendered the presence of women of the higher classes impossible. But during their forenoon halt the travellers possessed greater independence. They then, for the most part, notwithstanding the late period of the year, adopted the pic nic system, so general in the Peninsula, and of which such delicious reminiscences exist in the pages of 'Gil Blas.' The travellers would halt by the side of a mountain stream, or under the shade of some gigantic oak or chestnut. There for two or three hours the mules would be picqueted, with their nose-bags attached, well filled with barley—a fire lighted—partridges or hares, or other cold roast game, produced by the venerable usher—and with the aid of a bota, or leathern bottle of excellent wine, and a loaf of bread, the repast proceeded garly.

The elder of the ladies would then fold her arms, and, reclining against a tree, appear to slumber, while Clifford, stretched at the

feet of the younger, passed in gossip the happy hours.

His conversational talents were great; nevertheless he did not elicit the information he expected. Yet, in one respect, he had been successful; for it was evident that he was winning his way to favour. In the first instance the ladies had been assisted to their litter by their aged attendant; Clifford was now permitted to supply his place. Nor was this all. According to the rigid rules of Spanish etiquette, it was then strictly forbidden to touch a lady's hand, and the lifeguardsman, when he was first allowed to aid his fair companions to their vehicle, had, the better to support his assumed character conformed to the conventional rules of his adopted country, and carefully covered his wrist with his cloak; and upon that the ladies leant themselves as they mounted to their seat. Even this ceremony had in time been dispensed with. He was permitted to exercise his gallantries after the French fashion, and touch, as he placed her in her carriage, the young girl's fair fingers. Such a matter might have appeared trifling in England, but in Spain at least it was proof that the intimacy was proceeding at a rapid rate.

The very subjects, too, with which the young folks were mutually conversant formed an additional attraction. When people use the term 'society,' they mean, for the most part, a larger or smaller number of human beings placed in contiguity. Yet nothing less correctly represents the idea. For society something more is required than mere association. It means neither the banding together of old with old, or young with young, or even of rich with rich, and poor with poor. A similarity of age may do something, a similarity of class may do more; but what is essential beyond these two ingredients is a character not merely of education but of mind, which induces to look through the same medium upon the same objects; and causes hearts to respond from a common touch to the same sympathies. And it was this community of feeling which had so rapidly formed the bond between Clifford and his fair fellowtraveller. Both were young, both were light-hearted; both, as each soon discovered, were well-informed, and had seen much of what. in common parlance, is called 'the World.'

It was in vain, as we have already mentioned, that the young soldier, ever and anon, recollected the part he had to play, and fell back upon the affected tastes and ignorance of a contrabandista's life. It was in vain that he paraded his topographical knowledge of Mechlin and Paris, gravely adding a list of the moneys paid for lace at the one place and jewellery at the other; a subject in which he was, in fact, a proficient, as he had passed the four days that had preceded his departure from Paris in preparing himself for his new profession, by studying 'a price-current' furnished him on purpose by the Cardinal Dubois. The laughing eyes and fascinating manners of his companion speedily made him forget his assumed caution,

and he found himself recurring to courts and camps, and high solemnities, which if his acquaintance with persons and ceremonials were derived, as he averred, solely from the descriptions of others, proved him to be a contrabandista of a most happy memory.

The young lady was equally fortunate in her reminiscences. Her duenna, in the few words addressed to Clifford at Ernani, had sketched her ward's position. From time to time she herself had vouchsafed to add to the information. Her father and mother were both dead. The former had been an officer in the army, and a Spaniard; the latter was a Parisian. From her her daughter had acquired a knowledge of the language of France, and she had now been for a year on a visit to her relatives in that country. The designation of her father's family, Mademoiselle de Chalais, for so she called herself, never mentioned, and Clifford was too polite to inquire what it was obviously intended he should not know. It was probably of the middle class, for she spoke of her grandfather, and with pride, as having been a burgomaster. As to her French connections they apparently pretended to noble blood, from the prefix of the De attached to her name. But a similar claim to rank was made by thousands of families in France, and, of itself, it went for little. One thing, notwithstanding the number of her present attendants, seemed more certain: they could not be in affluent circumstances, for it had escaped the young lady upon several occasions, that her home in Paris had been in the Marais, one of the oldest, dirtiest, and least eligible parts of the French capital, and a residence in which could only have been dictated by a necessity for the most rigid economy.

If his suspicions as to her poverty were real, and the locality of her residence, little aristocratic as it was, truly stated, it was astonishing how extensive the young lady's knowledges were. She appeared to have as extraordinary a memory as her companion. From her position she could not, of course, have seen them; yet who could sketch off better the bloated face of the Duke of Orleans? or the beautiful eyes and graceful manners of the boy-king? or the black-browed, sarcastic countenance of the Duke of St. Simon? or the alabaster-like skin of Mademoiselle de Charolais? or the vixenish expression of the Duchess of Maine? She knew everything, from the colour of the hangings of the Œil de Bœuf at Versailles to the last new fashion of dressing the hair, invented by Madame de

Souza.

With such a disposition to gossip, and such wonderful powers of memory on both sides, it may easily be supposed that the hours passed rapidly. During the first day the conversation had been held in Spanish, but this was changed, according to the commands of the whinsical young lady, and she instructed her companion to address her for the future in French. How far the desire to carry on her flirtation without the knowledge of her duenna, who did not understand a word of it, had anything to do with this determination, is a matter which we will leave to our fair readers to decide.

'We are south of the Pyrenees, senor contrabandista,' said she; but I have been of late in France, and it is my wish that, for the future, French should be our only language. There is but one thing worth admiring on this side of the mountains, and that is the pretty fashion in which they address each other. I detest being called Mademoiselle de Chalais. Here I am Donna Teresa; so I pray of you, when you speak to me, not to forget giving me my proper appellation. It is a pretty one—is it not? There now! you need not say so many fine things on the subject. I was sure you would like it! and as for you, I am tired of saying senor contrabandista. Do you not chance to have godfathers and godmothers. and a Christian name, like other folks? Ah, Carlos! They call you Carlos, do they? Well, that's not amiss for a man in your horrid trade. However, in this country everybody is noble, from the beggar to the king; only the former, for the most part, holds himself to be the better man of the two. I do not see why you. should not be as noble as the rest. So you shall be Don Carlos, and I will be Donna Teresa.'

The young soldier made no objection to the honours thus thrust upon him, and the new appellations were adopted without further discussion. They seemed to add a fresh link to the rapidly-increasing intimacy; and sometimes by the side of the litter, and sometimes stretched under a chestnut-tree, the conversations went on with little intermission. Only a few days had been passed on the road, and they already seemed to have known each other for a lifetime. A snug corner in a drawing-room may be no bad place for a téte-à-téte, but for bringing young love rapidly to maturity there is nothing like the greenwood. The turfy dell and the leafy grove were the favourite haunts of nymphs and swains of old. It was there 'the goddesses came down to men;' and there, stretched upon the grass during the time of their mid-day halts, while listening to the soft, melodious voice of his companion, and basking in the sunshine of her smiles, did Clifford, following the example of the Golden Age, worship his divinity.

# CHAPTER VII.

#### THE VENTA.

In the mean time the travellers proceeded rapidly on their journey. The promise made by the duenna, that the mules which formed her train and that of her young companion should keep pace with the higher-bred animals of the contrabandista, had as yet been verified by the result; at least no delay had taken place from any fault of the beasts themselves. The shaft, however, of one of the litters had broken, and getting it repaired detained them six hours at Aranda.

This city stands on the southern margin of the great plain watered by the Douro, and near the base of the Somo Sierra,—the

lofty range which divides Old from New Castile. It had been the intention of the wayfarers to have left it before daybreak, so as to have reached the same evening the town of Buitrago, on the southern slopes of the mountain. But the time expended in mending the litter had disappointed these calculations, and delayed the start so long that it had become a matter of doubt how far they should not postpone their departure till the following day. But the young soldier was eager to press forward, and the ladies, unwilling probably from delicacy to retard his progress, after having, in some degree, thrust themselves upon his care, agreed, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, to resume their route—an arrangement which seemed well calculated for the comfort of their four-footed companions, as from Aranda to Buitrago was a distance of fifteen leagues,—rather too fatiguing an undertaking for a single day's journey.

It was decided, in consequence, when the move had been determined on, to make a short afternoon stage, and halt for the night at a small solitary inn of the name of 'La Juanilla,' about four leagues distant, and situated among the lower ranges of the Somo

Sierra.

At about three in the afternoon accordingly the party left Aranda and the extensive plains, which for some days past they had been traversing, and commenced the ascent of the mountain. For three weary hours did they toil up its side. The distance was not great, but the mules, nevertheless, began to show symptoms of fatigue, and, to add to their annoyances, the sun had set shortly after they had left the level country. It was, therefore, with more than ordinary pleasure that Donna Teresa learned from her attendant muleteer that they were at no great distance from their quarters for the night, and with girlish joyousness she summoned Clifford to her side, and communicated to him the agreeable intelligence.

'Know you aught of this "La Juanilla," Perez? said the young cavalier to his attendant, as he fell back, and once more took his

place by his side.

'But too much, senor,' was the reply. 'The venta has an evil reputation. It is said to be the resort of half the smugglers and rogues in Castile.'

'Come, Perez,' said Clifford, laughing; 'you forget that I am a contrabandista. You should not be so hard upon the fraternity.'

'A thousand pardons, caballero. I meant not to include among those I spoke of an honourable senor like yourself, who makes happy the Castiles with silks and tobacco without troubling the Customs. But it is said that the venta is the head-quarters of a band of robbers who sweep the whole of this side of the Somo Sierra. May the foul fiend take them!' And the usually apathetic Perez exhibited an agitation so extraordinary that it attracted the attention of his companion.

'You speak as if you knew them personally,' said Clifford.

'Something I do of one of their brood. The curse of the plagues

of Egypt be on him! But it matters not,' continued Perez, muttering to himself; 'it matters not; his hour, too, may come;' and with the words, his fingers unconsciously found their way to his girdle, and clasped the handle of a large knife which, as usual, formed a portion of the dress of men of his class.

'You anticipate danger, then?' said Clifford. 'I do.

'Why, in God's name, then, when that pompous fool of a muleteer who is in attendance on the senoras proposed stopping there for the night, did you not suggest another locality?'

'And where was one to be found, caballero? There is not

another venta within ten leagues.'

'Yet still to allow a young lady, and I warrant a noble one, to run into the lion's den was not the part of a Spaniard or an hidalgo.'

'What matters the senorita to me,' said his guide, in a sulky tone. 'I have contracted with your worship to convey you to Madrid safe and sound. I go not beyond my own party.'

'But you ought to have remembered, you scoundrel, that I, as a caballero, am in honour bound to protect Donna Teresa, and you

for the time, as my servant, to give effect to my wishes.'

'If your worship is disposed,' said Perez, with a sneer, 'to act the part of Don Quixote, as I think they call him, for I have heard gentlefolks speak of some such fool that went about succouring distressed damsels, you are likely, ere long, to have an opportunity of gratifying your fighting propensities. But there is no danger for the senoritas to-right. It is not in a house where there are some twenty arrieros, each with a good escopeta by his side, that any attempt will be made on their purses.'

'And where, if such villary be intended, will it be carried out?'
'Why on the highway of our lord and master, Don Philip,' said

the man, with a laugh.

'And when?' 'To-morrow, or it may be the day after; for in two days more we shall have cleared the Sierra, and we get amongst good men and true when we have once turned our backs upon its forests.

The conversation dropped, and Clifford let the reins fall on the neck of his mule, as the animal, at a slow pace, began to mount one of the steep ascents of the great mountain range, which even through

the darkness of the night loomed forth boldly.

In truth, the speculations of the envoy of Lord Stanhope were not agreeable. The mere danger did not affect him. On the contrary, there was something in his temperament that made its approach welcome, from the pleasure afforded by the excitement. But he could not altogether reconcile himself to the line of conduct he had adopted. He had been intrusted with a commission of the highest importance. Its success depended upon his immediate arrival at Madrid; and the position of the ministry at home, nay, the very safety of the crown of the house of Hanover might be compromised by its failure, and yet, with the knowledge of all this, he had allowed himself to be seduced by a pair of black eyes into

becoming the protector of one with whose very name he was scarce acquainted. And his folly was likely to bear its fruits. With the splendid animals which belonged to himself—well armed—and with little to induce an attack, it would have been hardly possible to have arrested his progress; but now with two helpless women in his charge, with their cavalcade of litters and pack-horses, and useless attendants, it would be no difficult task for two or three resolute men to stop, or at least delay, a party alike unprovided for defence or escape. Bitter as were his regrets, he was conscious that they came too late. From the half-muttered hints of his guide he felt that danger was near, and it was impossible to leave his fair charge exposed to its influence without making an effort to save her. With this thought he put spurs to his mule, and rejoined the party in front.

In the mean time, the road became more and more broken, alternately ascending and descending the steep low hills which formed the sides of the cordillera.

At length, after travelling some half league further, a light was seen in the distance; as they advanced towards it, sounds of music and laughter came upon the ear, till at last upon closer approach, the travellers found themselves in the neighbourhood of a long low building, which, even through the darkness of the night, appeared

in a state of disrepair.

The arrival of the party, considerable as it was, seemed scarcely to excite notice. Elsewhere, host and hostess bustle to the door, servants of all classes muster round the new comers, and everything exhibits that eager welcome which poor Shenstone used to declare was only to be found in an inn. But in Spain—true to their Arab descent—the pride and the poverty of the people serve alike to smother the existence of the feeling, and to prevent its display. Sometimes the proprietor of the establishment, or his better half, may lounge to the door under the influence of their curiosity, but when arrived there, either party stand as unconcerned and as listless as if there were no duties to discharge in providing for the wants of the travellers, and nothing to gain by their expenditure.

The venta of La Juanilla was no exception to the general rule. The landlord, indeed, and some muleteers, had carelessly moved to the outside on first hearing the sound of the mules, but returned to the interior as soon as they had ascertained the number and appearance of the coming guests, without having exhibited, in either case, the slightest wish to assist them. Left thus to his own exertions, Clifford presented himself at the side of Therese's litter, and having aided her and her companion to alight, conducted them within the

doorway, and demanded quarters.

The landlady, dirty and yet tawdry in her dress, received with undisguised ill humour, an application for apartments, which, though to be extravagantly paid for, nevertheless occasioned some trouble in their preparation. However, with the manner of one submitting to an overwhelming necessity, she led the way, grumbling

all the while at the airs given themselves by people of quality, more especially by those of the softer sex, who she declared, in half-muttered sentences, were unfit for any purpose upon earth but

standing in a balcony and listening to a serenade.

On gaining the upper story, the two ladies and their waiting-woman were ushered into their apartment. It was a small room, about ten feet square, without either window or furniture. The want of the former gave a close stifling character to its atmosphere, while the latter was supplied from a store closet which contained the sum total of the moveables of the establishment. From this were taken three mattresses. These were placed on the floor, pillows and some dirty blanketing were added, and the hostess, having presented her fair guests with the key, departed with the air of one who had amply discharged all the duties of her vocation.

Therese was too well acquainted with the manners of her country to feel or express surprise at the scantiness of the accommodations; nor, in fact, was she much affected by their absence. The Spanish higher classes, like those in the East, look upon their inns as nothing better than caravanserais—buildings offering protection, indeed, from the weather, and supplying the coarser necessaries of life, but nothing beyond them. She was accordingly provided with luxuries of her own; and from one of the pack mules her attendant now produced the clothing necessary for the night, as well as some wine and cakes

to allay hunger, till a more substantial meal was prepared.

Clifford, as soon as his fair companions had been provided for, descended to the kitchen. It was large, and had its ceiling supported by two or three roughly-squared beams, which served as pillars. The walls were coarsely plastered, and daubed with whitewash; yet even they had their ornaments. Here and there hung four or five highly-coloured, but ill-executed, prints of Saints, in frames which appeared to have been once gilt; while a stucco figure of the Virgin, painted in the universal blue mantle and glory round her head, occupied a niche at the end of the room; a small lamp burned below. Opposite was an enormous fire-place, and upon and around it were a cauldron and divers pipkins, apparently, from the steam which ascended from them, well filled.

In the centre of the spacious apartment a muleteer was dancing the fandango with the daughter of the host, the brightness of whose eyes and graceful motion tempted the spectator to forget the dirtiness of her velvet jerkin and the disorder of her unbrushed hair. The damsel gave point to her coquetry by using castanets; while a muleteer reclined on the floor, and, adopting what he considered a graceful attitude, acted as the Orpheus of the dancers, by playing on the guitar. Some ten or twelve men lay on the ground, wrapped in their large brown mantles, and each having the universal cigarito in his mouth; while through the door which opened into the stable might be seen some half-dozen more arrieros, who had probably finished their supper, and were now fast asleep in the stalls tenanted by their animals.

Near the fire-place, and sitting aloof from the rest, were three men, to judge from their appearance, of a higher rank than the general occupants of the venta. Two had little about them to attract attention. The third was about five and thirty, and apparently by birth an Andalusian; for, even amid the wreck occasioned by unbridled passions, he had still remaining much of the classic beauty of the province where the Arabs longest reigned and last lingered.

In this group the arrival of the party seemed to produce a much stronger feeling of curiosity than in the other guests, for all three hurried forth, and, under the shadow of a horse-stall, surveyed the new comers. The espial occupied not a moment, and scarcely had Donna Teresa been aided from her litter, when they once more took their places by the side of the kitchen fire, and resumed that attitude of quiet indifference which is felt or affected by the inhabitants of the Peninsula.

It was only upon Clifford's entering the room that they threw off their apathy. Without affecting to observe him, they, nevertheless, carefully and minutely studied his appearance. The investigation, though keen, did not last more than a second. It seemed, however, to suggest an idea, for the youngest of the three, the Andalusian, looked interrogatively at his comrades. The glance was replied to in both by a slight motion of the head; and the dark-eyed cavalier

turned with a graceful courtesy towards the young soldier.

He, too, on his part, had not been idle. Naturally shrewd, bold, and quick-witted, the varied life he had led had done much to sharpen his natural intelligence, and the conclusions he arrived at were generally most accurate with regard to those with whom he was brought into contact. Upon the present occasion, prepared by the hints of Perez to expect some more than ordinary dangers in the occupants of the venta, he on entering the public room, looked eagerly around him. The dozen muleteers, stretched on the ground, gave no cause for suspicion; and his eyes were at once riveted on the occupants of the fire-place.

'Ha!' said he to himself, 'faded velvet, broken plumes, shabby finery, and that devil-may-care look, which speaks acquaintance with the wine-shop and the dice-box. These are no doubt the gentlemen of whom Perez was speaking. Clerks of St. Nicholas, every one of them!' But there was nothing in the well-trained manner or glance that betrayed suspicion; and it was with a bland smile and a profound obeisance that he replied to the courtesy of

the Andalusian.

'Welcome, senor caballero,' said the latter. 'A cold night for a journey. Will your worship approach the fire?' And suiting the action to the word, he drew back his chair, and made way for the new-comer, who advanced and expanded his hands before the blaze with affected eagerness.

'The caballero came by the north road,' continued the Andalusian.

" He is no doubt from Aranda del Douro."

' Your worship is right,' said Clifford, with a smile.

'It is a lonely track, and not agreeable for late travelling,' continued the Andalusian. 'Both,' said Clifford, laughing, 'suit gentlemen of my profession well enough. Silks and cigars,' continued he, with a meaning glance at his three companions, 'travel

best by night.'

'Ho! ho! ho!' replied the Spaniard, 'especially when they pay nothing to the king's exchequer! Your worship is a contrabandista. I knew it,' continued he, as Clifford removed his large mantle from his shoulders—and displayed the dress beneath it. 'Had the cloak been off before, I had not asked the question. None,' he muttered, as with something like a sigh, be surveyed the rich clothing, 'none can deck himself out so veritable a majo, but a grandee of Spain or a contrabandista.'

'Trade is not amiss,' said the seeming smuggler, with a simper, and in the accent of affected humility. 'Not amiss! By the Virgin it is a fortune in itself—if a man get some trusty fellows about him and can depend on them. Is your worship well at-

tended?

'I know where to find men when I need them,' said his companion, with a smile; 'but I carry the best friends about me.' And, with the words, he pushed back his jacket, and while he held out carelessly a short double-barrelled rifle in his right hand, showed a heavy pair of pistols in his sash. 'Oh, the Virgin!—ho, by St. Jago!' were the delighted exclamations of the triumvirate, as they eagerly extended their fingers to the arms which were at once abandoned to them. 'Saw ever men such firelocks? and, God be with us, each of the pistols has got two barrels, and the locks, how clean they are in their click—perfect jewels—Spain never forged such—they must have come from England!'

'Ah! caballeros,' said Clifford, with a smile. 'You know the proverb—"money is a good thing but life is better,"—and gentlemen in my profession can't afford to risk a lock missing fire. But the senors are right—the remark shows them to be good judges of such matters—Spain did not forge them—they came from the heretics beyond sea. How the Virgin ever gave to these unbelieving dogs the power to fabricate such weapons is beyond my comprehension—but so it is—the senors are right—they are English!'

'And where was your worship fortunate enough to purchase such gems?' 'Garamba! When a man has been as far south as the Rock of Gibraltar he can get other things besides silks and cigars!'

'And there you bought them?' Clifford smiled.

'And are they really good ones?' 'The locks and the powder are sure, and to let you into a secret'—and Clifford stooped down, and in the tone of affected confidence, whispered in the ear of the Andalusian. 'I never miss my mark. So,' continued he, in a louder tone, and with a laugh of contemptuous indifference, 'what need have i of attendants when I have six men's lives at my belt?'

The Andalusian looked at his two companions.

Clifford marked the glance but said nothing. He was watching the game.

There was a pause for a minute.

'A good friend or a bad enemy, you would be, senor,' said the Andalusian, at length, 'and that, no doubt, is the reason why you have been selected as an escort by the senoras in the litter.'

'Your worship is a person of observation,' said the young soldier, in a tone intended to flatter the vanity of the speaker—'but in this instance you are wrong. I travel on my own account, and joined

the party by chance.'

'But you accompany the senoras to Madrid?' said the Andalusian, in a tone of interrogation. 'Senor caballero,' said Clifford, 'I am astonished that a person of your discretion should have asked such a question. You forget,' continued he, with a meaning glance, 'that it does not suit the safety of gentlemen, who, like myself, are at issue with the king's officers, to hint at their future movements. Who said I was going to Madrid? I have been with the senoras to-day—Caramba! Who can tell where I shall be to-morrow? But what ails your worship?'—continued he, as his companion started from his seat and gazed at the doorway—his hands clenched—his lips opened—as if some object had been suddenly presented to his sight, the cause alike of terror and hatred. Clifford turned round, and there, at the entrance of the chamber stood his guide Perez, pale, motionless, rigid—with his fierce Asiatic eye fixed on the Andalusian, as if he too had met a rattlesnake in his path.

### CHAPTER VIII.

## THE ROBBER AND THE GITANO.

For an instant the two men retained their attitude of hatred and defiance. It was but for an instant, however, as at the same moment it seemed to occur to both that the present was no place for exhibiting their antipathies. By a strong effort, each obtained the mastery of himself, and shortly reassumed that calmness of manner which forms the distinguishing feature of the Spanish character. The Andalusian once more took his seat by the fire, and engaged in conversation with his companions, while Clifford's mysterious guide directed his steps towards the host, and inquired what was to be had for supper.

The ventero gave the expected reply, Haytodo, 'There is everything,'—a phrase, which in Spain means, in fact, nearly nothing. On investigation it was found that the venta of San Juanilla was no exception to the general rule; but Perez and the muleteers of the ladies were too old travellers to be deranged by the emptiness of the cellar, or the larder. They had, in passing through the town of Aranda, taken advantage of a celebrated wine-store, and had filled their botas, or leathern bottles with liquor of a superior quality. From the same place they had brought a hare, some partridges, and

a piece of bacon. The coarser viands which were to form part of

the puchero, were procured from the host of the venta.

The travellers proceeded to discuss the supper, when ready, with eager appetite. When the meal was over, the leathern bottles were handed round rapidly; questions were asked, and stories told, sometimes referring to the incidents of the late war, and the prospects of its renewal; but most frequently to matters in which the guests took a keener personal interest—the most recent robberies on the roads, and the numbers and audacity of the highwaymen. When curiosity had somewhat 'abated, the tables and stools were once more cleared away, the landlord's daughter and one of the muleteers again occupied the floor, and exhibited their proficiency in a bolero to an admiring audience; while from the corners of the apartment, filled by parties less devoted to Terpsichore, came laughter, and gossip, and song.

At length night wore on, and the guests wrapping their persons in their large brown cloaks, betook themselves to repose. Some stretched their limbs on the floor of the kitchen, or near its fire, while others sought the stable and lay down beside their beasts.

Amongst these was Clifford. His mule, as the last arrival, had been placed close to the outer door, and thither he proceeded. In a Spanish venta undressing there is none. In one minute he had stretched himself upon the straw, near the head of his faithful four-footed friend, and soon was, or appeared to be, asleep.

Perez too had selected his place of repose. It was not, however, as it usually was, in the stable. Possibly, in the party whose appearance had so much startled him, he had recognised an enemy, and feared the darkness. Whatever the reason, he lay down on the floor of the kitchen, and within the light of its fire; his feet towards it, but with his head close to the wall, so as to prevent the possibility of any one approaching him unobserved; and he, too, in his

turn appeared to sleep.

An hour had elapsed, and everything was still. The host and his family had long since retired; and the deep breathing of all around told that most of the inmates of the hostelry were in the land of dreams. It was then that the Andalusian, who had taken up his quarters in a dark corner of the apartment, cautiously raised his head. Everything seemed to intimate that he alone was watching. With noiseless gesture he gradually raised himself to his feet, and taking his rapier in his hand, he once more cast his eyes round the room, as if to assure himself of the slumbers of his companions. The scrutiny was apparently satisfactory, for he stole across the chamber, and with noiseless step approached the muleteer. Already he stood by his side, and, drawing the sword from its sheath, was stooping as if to strike a blow, when Perez suddenly raised himself to a sitting posture by the aid of his left hand, while, with the speed of light, his right drew from his belt the long deadly knife, with the use of which his tribe is so familiar. For an instant the eyes of the two men as they gazed fixedly at each other, flashed fire, and it

seemed as if each were prepared for a death struggle. All at once a change appeared to come over the intentions of the Andalusian, for he returned his sword to its scabbard, and beckoning Perez to follow him, said in a low but distinct tone, 'Accursed murderer, I would speak with you.' Without awaiting reply, he then left the kitchen, and cautiously proceeded through the stable to the outer door of the venta.

For a few seconds the Gitano seemed uncertain how to act, for a shudder shook his well-knit frame, and his swarthy cheek flushed and paled by turns. At length he seemed to have adopted a resolution, for he sprang to his feet, and gathering his cloak upon his left shoulder so as to leave the right arm free, he followed the Andalusian.

When the latter reached the front door, he raised the latch, and went out, moving slowly towards the forest. Perez, too, in his turn, left the house, and having closed the door, by a few rapid steps suddenly approached his companion from behind. Whatever were his purpose, it was anticipated, for the Andalusian turned round, and waving his hand, with a smile, pointed to his left side.

'No—no—sir Gitano,' said he, 'I trust you not. To the front, I say—to the front! Your accursed race are too handy with their knives to be let out of sight. Come, keep in a line with me, and

move!

'And whither go you?' said Perez, and the tone, notwithstanding the agitation lately exhibited by the gipsy, betrayed neither excitement nor fear. It was cold, calm, self-possessed. 'But to yonder tree, cowardly slave,' said the Andalusian, misinterpreting the cause of the question. 'And fear not that I shall put you to death

to-night. I have need of you.'

As he spoke he moved towards a solitary chestnut of large size which stood close on the bank of the little river that ran by the venta. The ground around it was on three sides open and free alike of large timber and brushwood. On the fourth, it fell precipitously to the brook, which pursued its course in a rapid and noisy stream at the foot of the bank, but lay in deep shadow, for the branches of the giant monarch of the forest stretched themselves over its waters and intercepted the skylight. The ravine was of considerable depth, and had its sides covered with stunted coppice, which occasionally showed itself as high as the level ground.

To this place was Perez conducted by his companion. On reaching the tree, the Andalusian leaned carelessly against it, and having drawn his sword, pointed with a contemptuous gesture to a spot in

front, and near him.

'Stand there, Gitano,' said he, 'I would have conference with

you.' 'And what would you with me, Don Ambrosio?'

'Of that anon. Is it not sufficient that I, a Spanish hidalgo, should condescend to interchange words with a heathen hound, like yourself? Now answer my question. Who are the caballero and the senoras?' 'The caballero is, I believe, as your worship has

no doubt already guessed, a contrabandista. The senoras I know not.

'And this is all,' said the Andalusian, with a sneering tone. 'This is all that Perez the Gitano can tell me.'

'All, Don Ambrosio.'

'Lying scoundrel!' said his companion. 'Know I not the prying curiosity of your accursed race? Do you think that I am to learn to-day how much your pretended powers of fortune-telling are dependent on knowing every member of the families with whom you come in contact? How to aid your women in their sorceries, you spy out, with the cunning of a fox, the names of their intended dupes, their ages, their habits, their vices-all, everything, even to the most minute details of their features and of their dress. Do you think that I, Don Ambrosio, am to learn to-day that such knowledge is not the result of a chance curiosity, of a solitary Gitano, but is their eternal policy; and now with that Judas face of yours, you dare to tell me that you know nothing of the travellers, whose secrets for eight long days you have no doubt been sucking as a weazel sucks an egg? Poor innocent!' And the Andalusian laughed 'I have told your worship all,' said Perez, in a contemptuously. submissive tone. 'I can tell no more.'

'We shall see, senor Gitano,' said Don Ambrosio, with a quiet smile. 'Now listen to me. Heathen slave,' continued he, in a low voice, whose accents, though scarce above his breath, fell distinct and menacing on the ear of his companion, 'you recollect the time when my brother, Don Jorge, honoured a daughter of Egypt by casting on her the eyes of affection. He had a rude way of wooing, had my brother, and the damsel whimpered a bit, and it may be screamed. Do you recollect how one Perez, the brother of the wench, showed his gratitude for the grace and favour that a Spanish hidalgo had conferred upon a brown-skinned sorceress? Do you recollect, I ask, what that Perez did? Answer me.'

As Don Ambrosio spoke, the features of the gipsy became distorted from the action of strong internal agony. But it seemed as if the memory of the past had nerved his courage, for his eye flashed, his teeth compressed themselves, and his bearing for the moment was as bold and resolute as that of the man whom he confronted, and

with a calm voice, he said.

'Senor, the worm will turn if you tread on it, and why not the

Gitano? Your brother wronged my sister, and I slew him.'

'Murdered him, slave!' shouted the Andalusian. 'Slew him, indeed!' cried he, in a tone of the most intense contempt. 'You treacherously stabbed in the back with a knife, the man whom you dared not to face with a sword.'

'Each race,' answered the Gitano, coldly, 'wars after its own fashion. The children of Egypt may use a mean weapon, but they are content if it do its work.' 'Dog! make you a boast of the crimes of your tribe? But it matters not, the day has come when you have to pay their penalty.'

'Your worship is in error,' said Perez, quietly. 'The penalty has been paid already. The matter was brought before the Audiencia, and if your brother died, justice held that the provocation was sufficient.' 'It was not justice that willed it so,' said the Andalusian, in a tone almost inarticulate with passion, 'it was the interference of that old dotard the Duke of Escalona. But know, my friend, that the day of the Pacheco is gone by. Viceroy of Naples and Grand Chamberlain, though he may be, he is at feud with Alberoni. Caramba! the gardener's boy of Parma loves to comb the crowns of these grandees, and the first corregidor I meet with will be only too joyful to pay his court to the Cardinal, by applying the garotte to the neck of the gipsy Perez—the protégé of his great enemy.'

The gipsy was silent. He was too well acquainted with the mode in which the criminal law was administered in Spain, not to know that the threat of Don Ambrosio and his power of carrying it into

effect were well founded.

The Andalusian marked his silence, and interpreted it justly.

'Come,' said he, in a gayer tone, 'I did but mean to show you what I could do; and yet if you make yourself useful, I may be merciful. To revenge a brother's death,' continued he, with a sneering laugh, 'is as imperative on a noble of Andalusia as of Castile; but somehow, at the present moment, it appears to me that the first duty which Don Ambrosio Pimental owes is to himself. His pockets need filling, for, to say the truth, they have been more empty of late than befits the honour of an hidalgo. Thou shalt aid him in this matter, and for the present he will spare thee.'

'What would your lordship?' 'What! Has not your gipsy blood already scented the secret, as surely as a setting-dog would a partridge? The senorita travels with large attendance—she must be rich; and it would benefit the fortunes of Don Ambrosio, if the crowns and jewellery in the litter were transferred from her pockets

to his.'

'I see not your worship's drift.' 'Yes, you do. You are the muleteer of the contrabandista. The fellow has arms, and looks as if he could use them. You must delay him on the road. To-morrow the senorita must start alone.'

The gipsy seemed to feel a sudden pang. For a moment his face wore the expression of intense pain. It was but for a moment, however. Its usual cold character returned, and with apparent

apathy, he replied—

'It is impossible, senor. The caballero travels with speed. I doubt not that there be some speculation in silks waiting for him at Madrid, and if he reach it not, and that speedily, I guess that the enterprise will fail.' 'What matters it to Don Ambrosio Pimental,' said the Andalusian, drawing himself up haughtily, 'whether the miserable traffic of a low-born smuggler fail or succeed? I tell you he must not go to-morrow.'

'How am I to prevent him?' 'Lame your mules.'

'Senor,' said the gipsy, in accents of despair, 'it is impossible. The mules are of a high breed, and the purse of my tribe was exhausted in their purchase. I will not do the animals such an injury.' 'Will not, said you—you foul-mouthed hound?' shouted the Andalusian. 'I will slay you where you stand.' And he raised his sword to strike.

The gipsy went not back a foot. It might be he had expected some such violence, for in an instant a rapid motion of his left arm rolled his cloak around it, at the same moment his right hand drew from his breast a long double-edged knife, the brightness of whose steel flashed even in the starlit night, and poising himself firmly on his right leg, with his left thrown forward, and with the bearing of a Roman gladiator, he awaited the attack.

For a second it seemed inevitable, for the eyes of Don Ambrosio flashed fire, his left arm flew upwards, and his whole body trembled convulsively, as that of one who was about to expend his strength in a death-blow! Suddenly the humour changed—the rapier dropped—the Andalusian resumed his ordinary gesture, and with a

scornful laugh, he said,

'I meant but to frighten you; but again, I repeat, the contra-

bandista must not accompany the senorita to-morrow.'

Perez, with the changing mood of his antagonist, resumed his ordinary attitude; but his eye was watchful, his left arm still kept the cloak rolled round it; his right hand still held the knife bare, and his whole manner intimated fear of treachery.

'I see not how that may be, senor,' said he, in reply; 'the caballero is anxious to hurry on to Madrid, and even if I were to do your worship's bidding in laming the mules, that would not prevent him; for like all contrabandistas, he has crowns enough I warrant in his pocket, and would hire others of the arrieros at the venta.' 'You are right. If the mules were made utterly useless he would hire others; but for a delay of six or eight hours, it is hardly worth his

while. You must make them go lame for half-a-day.'

'Senor, it is impossible.' 'Do you prate to me, you lying villain?' said the Andalusian. 'Do you speak to me of the impossibility? Know I not that there is not one of your tribe who cannot in a night change a horse, be its colour what it may, to black, or gray,

in a night change a horse, be its colour what it may, to black, or gray, or brown, and make for the time the sound lame and the lame sound. I am not to-day,' said he, in a mocking tone, 'to learn of the talents of the children of Egypt, more especially of the knowledge of the hokkuna baro possessed by that most accomplished scoundrel Perez

the Gitano. Your mules must be lame to-morrow.'

The gipsy was silent. Over his expressive countenance changing feelings passed rapidly. At length he seemed to have adopted some resolution, for, with the air and voice of one who submitted himself unwillingly to a necessity he could not avoid or control, he said,—

'You shall be obeyed, senor. The mules shall be lame in the

morning.'

'It is well,' replied Don Ambrosio, too much accustomed to carry

his point to be astonished at his success. But remember, they must be not only lame, but thoroughly lame. If they are fit for the day's journey, you go, senor Perez, to the scaffold. The host of the venta is a friend of mine. He is not altogether in such good odour with the Justiciu as so worthy a man should be, and would be happy to atone for any little blunders of his own by surrendering to the Cardinal a follower, and people say a spy, of the hated Pachecos. It may be that the thumb screws or the rack might inform his Eminence that so clever a fellow as Perez the Gitano did not trade between the Spanish frontier and Madrid solely to let out mules or attend contrabandistas.'

The remark, well or ill applied, seemed to exercise a powerful influence over the gipsy, for he at once replaced the knife in his bosom, and with a tone far more conciliatory than any which he had hitherto adopted, he said,—'It is idle to dispute with you, Don Ambrosio. You are too powerful for me. The senorita shall depart

alone.'

'It is well,' muttered the Andalusian. 'But beware, heathen hound,' continued he, as he sheathed his sword, 'beware how you betray me, or you shall feed the crows before you are a week older. And now to your roost. I leave you not here to plot mischief in my absence.'

Perez obeyed without reply, and made his way straight to the

door of the venta.

Don Ambrosio kept his eyes fixed upon him till he entered, and then wrapping himself in his cloak as if for protection from the cold air of a November night, leant once more against the tree, and abandoned himself to his meditations.

'So that matter is settled,' said he, speaking aloud. 'He thinks not that I know the girl, and that she, and not her crowns, is my object; yet they, too, will be welcome. It is long since we have had a booty worth the taking, but this compensates for all mischances. for it brings both gold and revenge. She will leave the venta at eight. It will be five in the afternoon before she reaches the Bocca Chica; and yet I dare not venture the attack before, for there is a party of Miguelets on the road northward, and it will not do to be caught like a rat in a trap. And now to see after Master Perez. scarcely know what to make of that fellow. He refused me stoutly at first, and all at once becomes obedient to my slightest wishes. Ha!' continued he, 'the thought strikes me. The fellow became honey-lipped just after I hinted that he was a spy between France and Madrid. Has a chance shot hit the mark? By St. Jago, could I light upon some despatches from the enemies of Alberoni, the jolly Italian would make it a better trade for the Pimental than taking purses on the highway. But of that hereafter. If I manage to lay hands on the senorita, I shall have ducats enough, and shall need the aid neither of Cardinal nor King.'

So saying, Don Ambrosio abandoned his lounging attitude, and at

a slow pace followed the gipsy to the venta.

As he left the tree, a head cautiously raised itself from the bed of the little river; and over the top of the bank, watching the retreating footsteps of the Andalusian, might be seen the keen eyes of our friend Clifford.

# CHAPTER IX.

## A DIPLOMATIST PUZZLED.

It will be necessary to retrace our steps to account for the appearance of Clifford. He had been naturally much struck by the intense antipathy mutually exhibited by Perez and the Andalusian. To attribute it to one of those deeds of violence so common in social life in the Peninsula was easy enough; but still the event produced painful reflections, as it showed that his gipsy guide had at one time been in habitual intercourse with a man of a character apparently so dissolute as the high-born ruffler of the venta. The hatred displayed by either was intense, and could have been caused by no casual act of wrong, but must have been the result of a long train of circumstances, connecting the two parties, and in which one or both must have been actors.

There was mystery in this, and mystery seemed to be an indispensable portion of Perez's character. It had not escaped the recollection of the young Englishman that the Gitano had at their first meeting refused to let him the mules at any price, and had but a few minutes afterwards pressed them on his acceptance on his own terms. Such conduct in one of a class so notoriously interested was puzzling enough; but what added to Clifford's embarrassment, as he attempted to unravel the matter, was the fact that during their eight days' journey he had fancied on more than one occasion that he had observed signs of intelligence pass between the gipsy and the young lady traveller, of whom, and of whose very name. Perez had all along professed himself entirely ignorant. Was it possible that the two were in correspondence, and that he the diplomatist, who prided himself on his powers of reading the thoughts and guiding the actions of others, was after all, nothing but a puppet in the hands of a gipsy and a girl?

The thought was galling, and had already been the subject of much painful meditation. The adventure at the inn served but to entangle still further the already ravelled skein. Had his mission been discovered?—Was the gipsy a spy upon his motions?—A friend or an enemy?—In what light, too, was he to consider the Andalusian? If Perez were employed by the Cardinal, the man who was evidently his sworn foe might be a useful ally to the

English envoy.

In all this there was ample matter for reflection; and, notwithstanding the length of the day's journey, and of the fatigue consequent on it, the young soldier was unable to close an eye.

Clifford's bed-chamber, as we have mentioned, was nothing but a

stall in the stable, which he shared with his mule. The night was cold, and for greater warmth he had stretched himself under the manger, where, with plenty of wheat-straw beneath him, wrapped in his mantle, and his saddle for a pillow, he had, for one who had roughed it in the camp, no despicable accommodation. Notwithstanding, however, the luxury of his quarters, he could not sleep. An hour had elapsed since he had betaken himself to his couch, but still his busy mind was employed in speculations, in which the lady, the gipsy, and the Andalusian in turns played their part. His meditations were interrupted by the sounds of stealthy steps proceeding from the kitchen. They were evidently those of two persons. The stall which he occupied chanced to be next to the outer door, and commanded it. Clifford raised himself cautiously on his elbow, and, peering from the dark recess in which he had ensconced himself, beheld the door open. In another instant two figures stood out in strong relief against the star-lit sky, and, to his unutterable astonishment, they were those of the men whom he had deemed mortal enemies—Perez and the Andalusian. In another instant the portal closed, and the parties had disappeared.

'By my honour,' said Clifford to himself, 'the plot thickens. There must be some more than ordinary cause why those two scoundrels, so late at daggers drawing, should walk forth together so lovingly; and it concerns my credit to learn the secrets of their conference. Oh, Charles Clifford! Charles Clifford! you thought yourself a mighty clever fellow; but I fear your first essay in diplomacy will be to be cheated by a gipsy, fooled by a girl, and, perchance, finish by having your throat cut by a highwayman with a pedigree that reaches up to Don Pelayo! But I must see what the rascals are

about.

As these thoughts passed through his mind he sprang from his resting-place, and, advancing to the door, gently raised the latch. He pushed it slightly open, and, holding it a-jar, gazed eagerly around him.

He had not far to search. Though there was no moon, the stars were bright, and the night clear; and before him, at no great distance, moving at a slow pace from the venta, he saw the figures of Perez and the Andalusian. They halted, as our readers know, under the chestnut-tree. It was, no doubt, to be the scene of the conference.

'Ay!' said Clifford, as he saw them arrest their steps, 'now the scoundrels judge themselves out of ear-shot, and my man Perez will no doubt pour forth his secrets with an amiable frankness, which I have sought for in vain on the road. It concerns me much to know whether the fellow be a spy on me or not. If I find him plotting treachery, I will send a bullet through his head, as well as his companion's, with as little remorse as I would brain a weasel or a rat. But how to approach the fellows? Ha!' said he, 'the ground close by the tree is as black as midnight. It must be the precipitous bank of the river. I'll to the water; its noise will drown my foot-

steps, and it can be of no great depth, for as we crossed it to-night it scarce reached to the mules' knees.'

He left the house, and having first satisfied himself that his pistols were in his belt, closed the door gently, and keeping in the shadow of the wall, moved towards the little river: it was close by. For the convenience of travellers, the venta had been built in the immediate neighbourhood of its channel; and for Clifford to gain the top of the bank, slip down, and find himself in the stream, was the work of an instant. After that his progress was more easy. The brook meandered perpetually, and described a considerable circuit in its course between the inn and the tree. He was thus able to keep the bank between himself and the parties whom he sought to approach. At length, after wading cautiously down the river for a space considerably larger than had been traversed by Perez and the Andalusian, the broad shadows thrown over the stream by the giant branches of the chestnut intimated to him that he had arrived at the place of his destination. He listened. Voices came upon the ear, but the murmur of the water made them indistinct. It was necessary to approach nearer. The bank which bounded the brook was steep without being perpendicular, and had its turf broken at intervals by large shrubs, which dotted its side and fringed its top. Clifford did not hesitate: leaving the stream, by the assistance of the occasional brushwood he made his way up the acclivity, till he found himself on a level with the speakers, and in their immediate neighbourhood. There every word was audible, and the envoy of Lord Stanhope, drawing a pistol from his belt, and keeping his head and shoulders carefully ensconced behind a bush on the edge of the flat ground, listened attentively to the conversation.

Some sentences had, of course, been interchanged between the parties before his arrival, but they were few in number, and of little interest. Enough remained to give him a general insight into the relations which in past times had existed between Perez and the Andalusian—the seduction of the beautiful sister of the gipsy by a brother of Don Ambrosio, and the fearful revenge which had been exacted for it—the liberation of the murderer through the interest of the Duke of Escalona, and the influence exercised by Don Ambrosio, through a threat which he held out of still inflicting the penalties of the law on Perez, now that the power of the great noble who had protected him was diminished or annihilated by that of the still more mighty and adverse Prime Minister. Still two things puzzled him. Well acquainted with the cold-blooded policy of the race to which the Gitano belonged, and their callous indifference to robbery and bloodshed, he was unable to understand the interest which Perez evidently took in the preservation of the young ladyoccupant of the litter, except by giving full weight to the suspicions he had already entertained, that there was some tacit bond between them. Nor could be comprehend the reason why Don Ambrosio, who was evidently acquainted with the name of the senorita, should have taken such pains to conceal it from the Gitano—except by assuming that the Andalusian too was possessed of the secret of the mysterious connection between the gipsy muleteer and the fair traveller. One thing was self-evident, and that was, that Don Ambrosio had wrung unwillingly from the gipsy the means of securing the lady's departure alone on the following morning, for the purpose of making her a safer prey to himself and his comrades than might have been calculated on had the seeming contrabandista accompanied her.

The precise projects of the dissolute noble were also in their turn a matter of speculation. While the gipsy was present, the language of the Andalusian had pointed merely to robbery, but some few words which had dropped from him after Perez's departure seemed to intimate still greater outrage. Whatever it was, its scene was already determined on. The attack was to be made at a spot called the Bocca Chica; but even this told nothing, for of the place itself.

its vicinity, or its distance, Clifford was entirely ignorant.

Amidst such a mass of astounding revelations, half-understood plans, and half-formed suspicions, he remained for some time stupified at the spot which he occupied during the conference. What to do he knew not. One feeling only was fixed and unchanging, and that was to preserve the fair young creature, who had for the past week been his companion on the road, from the fearful fate which seemed to await her.

The resolution was formed easily enough—how to give it effect was a matter of greater difficulty. His first determination was to seize, the following morning, on Don Ambrosio, and denounce him to the nearest corregidor; but, on consideration, this plan was abandoned. Its success was, in the first place, problematical, for the young noble would unquestionably resist, and would, in all probability, be supported by his comrades and the scoundrel host of the venta. But supposing his capture effected, the real difficulty of the case became evident at once, for the accusation could only be supported by a detailed statement of the name and position of the accuser, and to do this was to betray his own incognito, and sacrifice the success of his mission.

The young soldier was obliged to go to work again. To preserve the secrets of the mission which had been entrusted to him, and at the same time to rescue the fair girl from the fate that awaited her, he must appear on the stage, not as a known and proclaimed defender of her rights through the medium of the laws of the country, or its civil or criminal tribunals, but after the fashion of the knighterrants of old, by his personal prowess, and the vigour of his right This method of solving the difficulty suited better than the former the gallantry and the fearless temper of Clifford. But even in this there was difficulty. To act with effect, it was necessary to know when to act, and the information could only be obtained from the Gitano. Would Perez give it, terrified as he was at the threat which Don Ambrosio had held out, of handing him over to the corregidor, in the event of his refusing to comply with his wishes? It was doubtful; yet something might be done if the gipsy would honestly lend his aid. Could he be confided in? Upon this Clif-

ford pondered long and anxiously.

'I will trust that fellow,' said he at length to himself. 'There is between him and the Andalusian a feud which can only be washed out with blood. Great as may be his terrors, the Gitano can wish nothing but evil to Don Ambrosio; and whatever the promises wrung from him, his secret efforts will be in my favour. Yes—it is no doubt a fearful risk; but trust him I must and will, and with God's help I will save the poor girl from the ruffian and his gang. What eyes she has! how laughing! how eloquent! It were a thousand pities that a glance so bright should ever be dimmed with a tear.'

So saying, Clifford once more slipped down into the stream. He slowly wended his way through the opposing current, and effected his return to the inn without his absence having been discovered. The night's adventures had been exhausting enough, but there was still something to do, and instead of once more seeking his rough couch, he took his place in a dark corner behind a pillar that supported the arched stall, and leaning against the stone-work with his arms folded, and his head slightly bent, like an out-post upon duty, commenced his watch.

An hour passed, but nothing was heard save the deep breathing of the muleteers, and the greedy bite of the mules as they refreshed themselves after the day's journey. At length a slight noise made itself audible in the kitchen, and steps were heard on the pavement as of one stealthily approaching. The night-walker reached the door, next to which stood the mule that Clifford had ridden; but, instead of raising the latch, stopped as if listening. Apparently he was satisfied, for he gently moved up alongside the mule, accompanying his step with a hissing sound. The animal seemed to recognise a familiar voice, for she welcomed the new-comer with a low whinnying neigh. At that moment a pair of powerful arms was thrown round him, and Clifford's voice whispered in his ear, 'What, Perez, my friend, you would start early. But we must have a talk together before we take the road.'

### CHAPTER X.

### THE LAME MULES.

THE mornings of November are cold and dark; and even in the mountain ranges of the South the elevation of the ground gives to the landscape that chilling, cheerless character, which is familiar to the inhabitants of 'the Black North.' It is strange how much our feelings are subject to its influence, and how often the despondency, which throws its shadows over the spirit, is but the result of the melancholy produced by the external atmosphere. Alas! for the ambitions of poor humanity, when the aspirations of its master

intellects may be nipped in the bud by the material influences of a winter's storm!

The morning which, on the first of November, gradually broke over the little inn that had been the night's quarters of the travellers, possessed something of this dispiriting quality. The wind had risen towards dawn, bringing with it heavy clouds, which occasionally burst in torrents of rain; and the lofty range of the Somo Sierra, whose peaks and forests frowned gloomily enough under a mid-day sun, assumed an even more forbidding aspect, through the medium of the masses of dark vapour which, now resting on its summit, and now rolling heavily before the storm, showed for an instant, or concealed, as if in a moving panorama, its dim and broken outlines.

Such was the scene that met the eyes of Mademoiselle de Chalais as she descended from her chamber, and looked eagerly towards the heights which were to be traversed in her day's journey. The prospect was little cheering, and for a moment her cheek blanched and

her eye lost its usual gay expression.

'What think you of the weather, senor contrabandista?' said she, turning to Clifford, who had followed her to the door of the venta. 'That mountain looks black enough, and, with its clouds, and precipices, and woods, has much the air of one of those horrible places which the old romancers tell us were the haunts of giants and ogres, and magicians, who used to pounce upon any unfortunate damsels that came within their reach. You look grave, senor,' continued she, as she watched his expressive features, over which the recollections of the night were passing rapidly. 'By my word, as a fair lady, were I to judge from your face I should say that you believed such things might happen now-a-days as well as in what some wretches call "the good old times." Come, said she, after waiting some moments in vain for a reply, 'you do not answer me. But I see how it is; you are forging an eloquent speech, in which you are about to prove that you were to play the part of the good knight, who was to put lance in rest, and overcome in my defence these monsters of the forest.'

'I trust,' said Clifford, 'that Mademoiselle de Chalais will need no such aid.' But notwithstanding his best efforts to conceal his feelings at her badinage, so little in consonance with the probable

future, the expression of his eye was grave and his voice low.

'Nay,' said Teresa, laughing, 'I begin now to believe in all soberness that there are just grounds for my remark, for had you been the knight of La Mancha himself you could not have been a caballero of a more rueful countenance. But who comes here?' continued she, as Perez approached. 'No less a person than your trusty squire of Irun, with a face and figure as little like Sancho Panza's as well may be; and his mission, no doubt, is to inform the senor contrabandista that the mules are ready for the road.'

'Alas, senor—ay di mi! senorita,' said the Gitano, wringing his hands, and exhibiting all the signs of intense despair. 'I come the

bearer of sad tidings. Some son of the devil must have cast on the mules an evil eye. They are lame. They—the pride of the fair of Leon—are all dead lame.' And again Perez wrung his hands, and

moaned as if in overwhelming sorrow.

'What say ye, Perez?' cried the young lady, fixing her eyes on his face with a look which seemed to read his inmost soul. 'The mules lame and all lame? Pshaw! you mock us. Such a thing could not have happened unless it had been done on purpose.' And again her eagle glance fixed itself on the Gitano.

Apparently he was unwilling to meet the scrutiny, for he cast his eyes on the ground, and muttered, in a tone almost inarticulate, 'The fact is so, senorita. How it has chanced I know not; but the

mules are lame.'

Therese again bent on him a look, in which anger seemed mingled with astonishment. 'I will not believe it, Perez—I cannot; I must have other evidence than yours with regard to a matter so extraordinary. Senor caballero,' said she, turning to Clifford, 'have you seen anything of those animals of yours? But I ask your pardon,' as some sudden consciousness came over her, and her face, under its influence, crimsoned from the temple to the chin. 'Ten thousand times I ask your pardon. I have been interfering in a matter which concerns me not; but Perez and I have been so long fellow-travellers, that I had forgotten that he did not form part of my train.'

'Madam,' said the young soldier, with an air of gallantry, 'both he and I would be proud to be enrolled among the attendants of so fair a mistress. But I will go and see the mules myself. I doubt not the fellow has been rehearsing some wretched joke.'

Clifford accordingly bent his way to the stable, from which he soon after returned, with his face apparently distorted with anger.

'Scoundrel,' said he, seizing the gipsy by the collar, and shaking him with great violence, 'this must have been your work. What hinders me from putting you to death on the spot?' 'No, no, for the love of heaven, no,' said Mademoiselle de Chalais, interposing, 'I pray you do no violence.'

But her words were little attended to, and Clifford still continued to grasp the gipsy by the collar, while the fingers of his right hand played, as if unconsciously, with the butt end of the pistol in his

belt.

'Holy Virgin! what a coil is here,' said a soft voice at his elbow, and he turned round and found himself in the neighbour-

hood of Don Ambrosio.

'Senor contrabandista,' continued the new comer, in the same honeyed accents, 'what has raised your anger? Has this poor devil of an arriero displeased you?' 'Displeased me, indeed! Per todos los Diublos! He has made me mad,' shouted the envoy. 'I am, as the rascal well knows, in a hurry for the south, and here I find all his mules are dead lame.'

'Come, senor caballero,' said the Andalusian, 'things may not be

so bad as they look. I have some knowledge of horseflesh, and if the arriero will lead forth the mules, perchance I might be able to

suggest a remedy for the evil.'

Clifford suddenly complied with the suggestion, and took his hand from Perez's throat, while the Gitano, evidently well pleased to be free from the grasp of his angry master, hurried to the stable, from which he soon after issued, leading the three animals belonging to him. When first seen at Irun, from their power and beauty they had been coveted by every horse-dealer in the town; but a single night had produced changes which, to say the least, were extraordinary. The heads of the quondam gay-spirited animals drooped, their eyes were dull, and all three limped in a manner which might have induced the supposition that they had abandoned all claim to a fourth leg, and intended to content themselves with the use of three for the rest of their lives.

The effect of their appearance upon the spectators was various. Clifford, his teeth compressed, and his hands elenched, looked as if endeavouring to master a violent burst of passion. Mademoiselle de Chalais laughed and wept by turns; while from the lips of the arrieros who had left the loading of their mules, and crowded round the unfortunate animals, there arose a perfect chorus of 'The evil eye, the evil eye!'

The Andalusian said nothing, but with the air of a man who thoroughly understood the subject, and did not condescend to lose time in useless exclamations, proceeded to the animals, and examined them in turn, looking into their nostrils, raising their eyelids, and tapping each nail of the shoe of the ailing hoofs. The result was satisfactory, for with a smile he approached Clifford.

'Voto a Dios! Senor, the mischief is not great. There is something of fever in the head and hoof, and the animals are altogether unfit, in their present state, to crawl a league; but great is the power of science and medicine; and I have drugs in my saddle-bags of which I will compose a draught so efficacious that I pledge you the honour of a hidalgo that the mules will be ready for the road to-morrow.' 'To-morrow,' repeated Clifford, as if to himself. 'Are you assured of that, senor? Be you certain that in the morning they will be fit to resume their journey?

The Andalusian repeated his confidence in his veterinary knowledge in a tone intended to imply that after his protestations on the subject it would be an insult to him to doubt its efficacy, and hurried into the interior, as if to compound the panacea which was to produce such marvellous results. The Gitano, probably eager to escape from the presence of his master, followed him, and Clifford

and his fair companion were once more alone.

'Madam,' said the former, 'you see my evil fortune. If I am to be the knight who is to protect your journey across this monster-haunted region, Mademoiselle de Chalais must postpone it till to-morrow.'

The fair girl made no answer. The tears stood in her eyes, and

her whole countenance wore an expression of irritation much greater than the circumstances appeared to warrant. Evidently there was a struggle between contending feelings and interests, for smile and frown chased each other over her expressive forehead, changeful and rapid as the humours of an April hour. She spoke at length:—

Senor,' said she, with a faint attempt at a smile, 'I must endeavour to travel without your guardianship. I have been already too long on the road, and must reach Buitrago to-night. And here comes the litter,' continued she, in a gayer tone, 'and that, if I were doubtful, would decide the matter; for I should as soon have courage to face the anger of the Cid as that of my most venerable Master of he Horse, who, with his long sword, peaked beard, cadaverous face, and buckram air, looks as if he had embodied in his own person the genealogies and the dignity of all the nobles of Castile.'

Clifford made no effort to stay her, but assisted the young lady and her companion to their litter, on either side of which stood Don Diego and his chief aide-de-camp, with their broad beavers in their hand, and an air of courtly respect in their manner which would have done credit to the days of Philip II. When Therese and the duenna had taken their places, the noble muleteer mounted and led the way, the litters and pack mules followed, and the whole cavalcade slowly moved up the hill, and were gradually lost amidst its forests. Clifford watched their progress with an expression which had become gloomy and anxious from the moment that it was no longer subject to the observation of his fair companion, and when, as a turn of the road was screening the party from his sight, she leant from the litter and gaily waved her hand-kerchief in farewell, a tear started to his eye, and he shivered as if under the influence of a convulsive spasm.

Some minutes had elapsed since Therese had been lost to view; still Clifford lingered on the spot, his eyes turning from time to time towards the mountain range, as if through its coverts they could still trace the progress of the travellers. His reveries were broken by a slight touch upon his arm, and the Andalusian, who had approached him unobserved, stood beside him.

Senor contrabandista,' said he, 'I have compounded the drug, and given it to your arriero. He will administer it to the mules at sundown, and I warrant your worship will be on the road to-morrow.'

'I thank the caballero for his kindness,' said Clifford, moving his hat and bowing with profound courtesy. 'With such a knowledge of drugs, the senor is provided against mischances, but he is not the less lucky to have escaped them. The evil eye which struck my mules has not affected your jennet, if that noble black horse in the stable, with his large nostril and fiery eye belong to the caballero?'

'He does, senor,' said the Andalusian, with evidently gratified

vanity. 'There are few better steeds in Spain.'

'And do you mount him to-day, or am 1 to have the pleasure of your society?'

'Quien sabe! The weather looks dirty, and I am a man of independence, senor—a true Castilian, who love my pleasure and do nothing. I travel only to amuse myself. Caramba! If the day continue wet I will stick to the shelter of the venta.'

With the words, he returned to the kitchen; thither Clifford followed, and wrapping himself in his mantle, to the occupants of

the chamber appeared to sleep.

Never was slumber further from his eyes. As the minutes passed on, his face became more and more clouded, and his teeth compressed themselves together, as if with a fierce energy they endeavoured to stifle some inward feeling of intense pain. At length came eleven o'clock. With the hour appeared the forenoon meal of the venta, and the young soldier was aroused to share it. The Andalusian and his two companions had already taken their places at the table, and there too was Perez. The hidalgo appeared in

high spirits, and ate and drank largely.

Come senor,' said the dissolute noble, in a gay tone, as he remarked the gloomy looks and scant appetite of his vis-à-vis. 'What, still brooding over the lameness of these accursed mules? Vaya! One in your profession must have encountered many mischances, and a single twenty-four hours' delay on a journey is not such mighty matter as to make a man miserable. So cheer up. To our next meeting, senor;' and the ruffian filled his tumbler to the brim with wine, and nodding to Clifford, took it off at a draught. 'And now, senor ventero,' continued he, 'the weather is clearing fast, and my friends and I will to the road. So out with your bill, and tell the muchacho to bring the horses to the door.'

The reckoning was soon paid, and the horses brought round. Ere the adventurers, however, put foot in stirrup, each man carefully examined his girths and fastened over the lock of his gun the leather

hood intended to preserve it from the damp.

'We take our precautions, senor contrabandista,' said the Andalusian, with a flushed face, and with somewhat of a stammer in his speech, as he observed Clifford's eye watching his movements. 'We take our precautions, I say. There are always rogues abroad on the Somo Sierra, and—caramba!—one might meet with them.' As he spoke, he mounted his horse. His companions followed his example, and in obedience to a sign from their chief, started off and took the road up the mountain which had already been traversed by the ladies in the litter. The Andalusian watched them till out of sight. He then shook himself loose in the saddle, and touched the horse with his long, large spurs. The fiery animal plunged violently, but the rider sat firm as a rock.

'Ha! my friend Don Rodrigo,' said he, 'thy rest has done thee no disservice. Thou shalt have a gallop to-day.' And he slacked the rein, and patted fondly the neck of the beautiful animal, which whinnied with pleasure, and once more stood motionless, as if the caressing touch of his master's fingers had transmuted him into stone. For a moment or two the rider looked as if he also had

become as lifeless as his steed, for he sat rigid in the saddle, his hand upon his thigh, his glance fixed on vacancy, and his colourless face cold and pale as monumental alabaster. Suddenly the eyes lightened, the upper lip curled, and gathering up his reins and pressing the horse gently with his knees, he rode towards Perez, who was standing some twenty feet in front of the door of the venta, to all appearance employed in studying the points and movements of the Arab.

'Sir arriero,' said he, with the smile of a fiend, 'I would speak with you. There is a little matter which in our conference of last night I forgot to mention.' With the words, he stooped low, and

whispered something in the Gitano's ear.

Scarce was it uttered, when the rider struck his horse violently with the spur, and the black steed, as if maddened by the steel, sprang into the air, and with the speed of light followed his companions up the mountain road.

As for Perez, the words exercised on him an almost magic influence, for the strong-nerved man gave a shriek, and clasping his

hands wildly, sank to the ground.

# CHAPTER XI.

### THE PURSUIT.

CLIFFORD hurried to the side of the Gitano.

'Has the villain stabbed you?' said he.

'No, no, senor,' replied Perez in a low tone, and raising himself feebly from the ground. 'It was but words, yet they stung as sharply as a knife's point. But this is no time for woman's wailing.

We must away: but first to steady my hand.'

As he spoke he drew from his breast a small phial, which he applied to his lips. Whatever were the contents of the draught, it must have been potent, for its effect was soon evident. In about three minutes the colour began to come to the cheek, and the power to the eye. With the awakened vitality returned the energies of the Gitano, and he approached Clifford, and with a glance which bespoke some prearranged plan, whispered in his ear, 'Senor, we must to work.'

With the words he proceeded to the stable, and, bringing forth the three mules, led them to a shed which stood some hundred yards in the rear of the main building, and was usually appropriated to the cattle of the innkeeper. As soon as he had fastened the halters he took from a large haversack, in which were contained some horse-nails and shoeing materials, a blacksmith's forceps, and applying himself to one of the halting animals, raised the wounded foot and drew from its frog a short, sharp, broad-headed nail, which had been placed within the interior circle of the shoe, and made to act upon the hoof by some stiff pitch, which at once had kept it from changing the position, and concealed it. This done, the Gitano

carefully washed the wound with soap and water. The same process was adopted with the two remaining mules, and the poor brutes, freed from the pointed iron which had galled them, once more stepped firmly. Their other ailments were next the object of attention. Out of their nostrils, Perez washed something of a sickening smell, and carefully sponged their noses, eyes, and heads with vinegar. Yet the treatment, scientific and judicious as it might have been, produced little result. The annoyances which had destroyed sense and spirit had, indeed, been removed, but the drug had been too powerful to allow its effects to pass away immediately, and all three still looked stupified and listless.

'They are pretty well filled out,' whispered the gipsy to Clifford, for I served them with a double allowance of barley ere I put that foul stuff in their noses, when I brought them out to the senorita; but they will have a sharp day's work of it, and I must give them something to restore their pluck, and keep them up to their work,

were it for a ten hours' gallop.'

So saying, he proceeded to the kitchen of the venta, and procuring a bucket from the landlord, poured into it several bottles of the strong beer of the country. With this he mixed a little brandy, and added from his haversack some liquid, whose secret virtues, and the proportions in which they were to be administered, were known only to those most knowing of horse-doctors, the Spanish gipsies. When the potion had been prepared, and its efficacy ascertained by repeated tasting, he returned to the stable, and leading out one of the mules, flung its halter across a beam immediately over head.

'Now, senor,' said he, giving the end of the rope to Clifford, 'raise his head a bit, while I give him his aguardiente. Vaya!' continued he, in a joyous tone, as the last animal had the draught poured down its throat, 'look at their eyes now, senor. Would you

not swear that they would gallop with any barb in Spain?"

And, certainly, the boast of the gipsy was not extravagant, for the mules, so late lame and languid, stood once more with forward ears, and sparkling eye, and open nostrils, the personification of health, and fire, and vigour.

And now, continued the Gitano, 'in five minutes we shall be off; and while I put on the saddles, your worship had better pay the ventero. But be careful of the fellow; he is a spy of Don

Ambrosio's, and I see he is already suspicious.'

The instructions of Perez were obeyed; the mules came to the door, and the travellers were once more in the saddle. Clifford, with formal courtesy, removed his sombrero, and bending to the

saddle bow, gave the parting salutation to the host.

'Con Dios, caballero,' said the rascally landlord, with a sneer, 'I wish your worship a safe journey; but you had better have waited till to-morrow, for it is twelve long leagues to Buitrago. It will be dark ere you reach it, and they say the roads are dangerous.' 'May the Virgin protect us, senor ventero,' was the courteous reply; 'and as to the darkness—when a man has for ten

years been getting bales across the frontiers he becomes like a cat, and can see as well at midnight as at noon-day. So, once more,

adios: and the parties proceeded on their way.

For a while they moved at a slow pace. Clifford would have hurried, but the Gitano whispered to him, 'Not yet, senor, not yet. We must walk the beasts till we have got out of sight of the venta. Saw you how the old scoundrel smiled? He thinks we are too late, but it may be he is mistaken.'

Thus conversing, the parties reached the point of the road turning into the forest, and at which Mademoiselle de Chalais and her litter

had been lost to the eyes of the young envoy.

'Now, senor,' said Perez, 'we are out of sight, and can choose our own course; and in troth we must make haste. Mark you the speed of Don Ambrosio?' pointing to the deep dents left by the hoofs of the Arab in the muddy road. 'I will not deny it,' said Perez, his jockey sympathies making him for a moment forget even his hatred, 'I will not deny it, Don Ambrosio has as good a judgment in horseflesh as ever a man in Spain; and were you to hunt for a year, through every fair between Leon and Xeres, I doubt if you would find a horse to match that black Don Rodrigo. But now begins our work, and it is likely to be rough enough, but it will save us a good six leagues, and we must face it.

They had reached, as he spoke, a small rivulet, which crossed the road, and found a path for its waters down the mountain-side. Here the gipsy left the highway, and turning short to the left, struck into the forest, and followed the course of the little stream. approaching or leaving it as his experienced eye detected the safest passage for his steed. Clifford followed close behind, and the baggage-mule, true to its instincts and habits, unguided and uncared

for, brought up the rear.

A quarter of an hour found the travellers once more on the open ground. The brook which they had followed was a tributary of the little river which passed the venta, and joined it about half a league above the inn. The banks of the larger stream were fringed with open meadows, which, covered with the finest turf, and nearly level, opposed no obstacle to the progress of the wayfarers. Along these, accordingly, Clifford and Perez advanced at speed, crossing and recrossing the river repeatedly, as its nearer or farther bank offered the greatest facilities for transit. After about an hour and a half's rapid movement, the valley began to narrow; the meadows on either hand scarcely extended more than a few yards from the edge of the water, while from their further boundary rose the steep sides of the mountain range.

' Now, senor,' said Perez, 'here comes one of the main difficulties of our journey. We are close to the cedar brush. The people hereabout call it Jacob's ladder, and the name suits well enough, for it is more fit for angels with wings to their back, than either two or

four-legged beasts. Is your heart stout, senor?"

His companion replied with a contemptuous smile.

'The caballero may laugh,' said Perez. 'There's many a man who would march up to a cannon's mouth, who would not face the pass above there. The Maragatos are the boldest arrieros in Spain, but even they will not look at it; and to tell you the truth, except in a

matter such as this. I would not risk it myself.'

While he was speaking, the travellers had been approaching a portion of the glen, where the mountain, closing in on either side, seemed to defy further progress. On the right, the main river, which had hitherto been in turns murmuring gently among pebbles, or sleeping lazily in long reaches, now poured down over a mass of rocks in a continued sheet of foam. Beyond this, and higher up, the valley appeared again to open, for light came through the branches of the forest as if the sun's rays had found entry behind them.

'It is an ugly place enough,' said Clifford, 'but I suppose we must face it.' 'Face that! There is no difficulty there,' exclaimed his companion, in a contemptuous tone. 'Here is our path,' and he pointed to the right. Clifford turned in the direction intimated, and indistinctly seen through the giant stems of the forest timber, and the thick foliage of the underwood, was the mountain rising like a wall, and down this trickled a tiny rivulet, which now shining like a silver thread among the trees, and now making itself heard in mimic waterfalls, found its way to the stream below.

'Why, friend Perez, you are mad,' said Clifford, 'there is no track there; and if there were, no four-footed beast could climb such a precipice.' 'Track, senor, there is none true enough, for they be few who will look at the pinch; but that stream, paltry as it is, will serve to guide our way, and steep as the bank may be, we must even try it. In the meanwhile, we will ease the mules, for we must

put foot to the mountain ourselves.'

He dismounted as he spoke. Clifford followed his example, and the Gitano removed the bridles from the heads of the animals, tying them to the saddles, and muttering as he did so, 'The poor beasts will climb easier without them. Did they fall with these powerful Moorish bits in their mouths, they would scarce scape breaking a jaw. Now,' said he to Clifford, 'I will lead the way. The Capitano,' continued he, pointing to the mule which had carried him, 'follows me like a dog, and the Duchessa and the Muchacha will stick close to his heels. As for you, senor, beware, if you fall, that you break not the stock of your rifle, and buckle the leather hood tight over the locks. If a branch were to touch your triggers, I should be fairly sped. And now are you ready?'

His companion replied in the affirmative, and the Gitano wading across the little river, which intervened between him and the foot of the mountain, was instantly lost amid the brushwood. For a moment the leading mule seemed to hesitate, and uttered a short whinnying neigh; but a cry of 'Ho, Capitano, come along my boy,' seemed to be understood by the intelligent animal, for it at once plunged into the stream and made towards its master. The

Duchessa, which had been the steed assigned to Clifford since the commencement of the journey, instantly followed the *macho*; while the baggage animal, as before, trod close in the steps of its com-

panions.

As they entered the brushwood, and in turns disappeared from his eyes, Clifford stood for a moment lost in astonishment. But it was no time for meditation. The coppice was so thick that a few yards would have been sufficient to remove him from all companionship with his fellow-travellers, and grasping his rifle in his left hand he too plunged into the channel, waded across the stream, and commenced the ascent.

Its character, little flattering as the colours were in which Perez had painted it, had, nevertheless, not been exaggerated. The mere steepness of the range would, of itself, have arrested many men less determined; but even that difficulty had become infinitely more formidable, from the broken character of the ground, the thickness of the coppice, and the large logs of dead timber which were everywhere scattered over the surface. Sometimes the mountain side would be scooped into rocky terraces, up which, when low, the mules clambered like cats, and around which, when too lofty to be faced, they made a detour so as to attempt the bank in a more auspicious locality. Sometimes the brushwood was so thick, that it was impossible to force a way through its branches, and even when this was successfully accomplished, torn saddles, and straining girths, showed alike the power of the obstacles, and the desperate efforts of the animals to surmount them; while, at intervals, a gigantic tree lying across the only available roadway would bring the whole party to a standstill, and force them to retrace their steps, and descending the hill to seek from below a more open path. Still Perez struggled on, and slow as was his progress, the rapidity of his ascent far exceeded that of his companion.

Less acquainted with mountain travel, Clifford made his way upward with great difficulty. He had long lost sight of the Gitano and his beasts, but notwithstanding he kept his course unerringly, guided by the bells on the bridles, or the crackling of the branches, and not unfrequently by loose pieces of rock, which, detached by a struggling hoof, rolled madly down, threatening destruction to any with whom they came in contact; while, ever and anon, there came upon his ear from above the cheerful cry of the gipsy of 'Ho Capitano'—'Well done, Duchessa'—'For shame, Muchacha,' as with varying voice, and now praising and now abusing the mules, he led the way up the steep.

For a long hour did the travellers struggle on after this fashion. Down Clifford's cheeks the perspiration was running fast as winter rain, and even his strength, energetic as he was, was nearly exhausted, when a sudden silence left him at once without a guide. He shouted, and the shout was returned. It was repeated at short intervals, and in some quarter of an hour more he rejoined his party.

Perez was sitting at the foot of a perpendicular rock, which towered high among the trees, and extending along the face of the bank, offered, apparently, an insurmountable obstacle to their further progress. A small spring of pure water was at his feet, and near it stood the three mules, their flanks and necks white with foam, while their drooping heads and half-closed eyes showed the exhaustion produced by the ascent.

The gipsy himself seemed to have suffered scarcely less than Clifford, for his face was deadly pale, and his long, matted, dark locks were dripping with perspiration, while a convulsive heaving of the chest showed that his breathing had not as yet resumed its ordinary tranquil character. Still, gloomy as was his mood, the first appearance of his master could not help provoking the ordinarily grave Gitano to a smile; for the velvet jacket and silk waist-coat, which, on the preceding day, had excited the envy and admiration of Don Ambrosio, were in tatters, and even the broad sombrero had lost a portion of its brim.

'A thousand pardons, senor, said he, gaily; 'I must have laughed had I died for it. By my troth, the bushes seem to have made

intimate acquaintance with your worship's wardrobe.'

' Vaya!—who cares?' said Clifford; 'I would give the best suit in Madrid for a few minutes' rest and a cup of that crystal water.'

'Spice it with aguardiente, senor; I pray of you mix it with the brandy; feverish as you are, the cold spring would be death. Ah, that is right,' as Clifford produced a flask from his pocket; 'but be moderate, and now sit you down here, and when you have recovered your wind, we will talk.'

In silence he followed the direction of his guide, and for five minutes not a word was spoken by either party. At length, as respiration returned, Clifford looked around him, but his glance

betokened anything but satisfaction at the survey.

'Well,' said he, at length, 'we have mounted that accursed hill, but unless, Perez, you can provide us with wings, I do not see how we are much benefited, for this cliff says "halt" to all further progress, and as far as I can judge, it runs along the whole face of the hill.' 'You are right, for a good league at least.'

'Per todos los Diablos—the news is pleasant. So our fatigues are

only commencing.'

'Our fatigues are over. It is our danger that is about to commence.'

'You speak in riddles, senor arriero,' said Clifford, pettishly, and

he flung himself once more at full length on the turf.

'I will make the matter simple, your worship. I told you when we started from the river that we should follow the little rill that joined it. There,' continued he, as he pointed to the spring, 'is its source. We are now near the top of the mountain, and four hundred yards more will put us on easy ground.'

'Voto a Dios! said the young soldier, joyously, 'I am glad to

hear the work is so nearly over.'

'Softly,' said the Gitano, 'recollect the old proverb which bids

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you not to halloo until you are out of the wood. The work is still to do; do you see this rock? 'A blind man might safely answer that question in the affirmative. It is a good hundred feet high.'

'Our destination lies on the other side of it.'

'Pleasant news enough, but I could have guessed that without your aid. What I want to know is, how that other side is to be got at?' 'Come and see,' replied Perez. 'Nay, leave your rifle on the ground, we will return.'

The gipsy rose and moved towards the left, along the foot of the crag. At no great distance their view was interrupted by a thick brushwood, which grew close up to the base of the cliff, and through

this the travellers made their way.

Clifford was the first to force a path through the leafy screen; but scarcely had he cleared its branches, when he started back in terror. The Gitano, who had followed close behind him, saw the gesture, and interpreted it correctly.

'Your heart fails you, senor,' said he; 'then all is lost, for there

is the road to the Bocca Chica.

## CHAPTER XII.

#### THE BOCCA CHICA.

THE scene that met the eye might have tried firmer nerves. The mountain range which had hitherto exhibited itself in deep slopes and occasional rock seemed here to have suddenly arrested its course, for, with a face as perpendicular as a plummet-line, it shot down in a fearful chasm to the plain below. Above, it rose some hundred feet over the heads of the travellers. Along the precipice, and on the same level as that on which stood Clifford, ran a ledge scarcely three feet broad, and occasionally uneven in its surface. It wound round the rock till it disappeared from the sight, and alone broke the smoothness of the mountain wall. The scene was gloomy enough, but the wind of a November day, which had been unfelt in the thickness of the forest, came in gusts along the face of the crag, and, as it rose and fell, now sighing and now in a louder tone, added, if possible, to the dreariness of the landscape.

'Weil, sir Gitano!' said Clifford, in a tone of irritation, as he turned from contemplating the scene before him, 'the chasm is, no doubt, magnificent, but I am in no humour for the picturesque. Where is the path you spoke of?' 'There,' said the gipsy, pointing to the narrow ledge which ran round the rock. 'That, senor,

is our road to the Bocca Chica,'

'Are you mad, gipsy?' said the young soldier, turning in anger to his companion. 'Is this a time for mirth?' 'Senor, I jest not; along that ledge is the only road to the Bocca Chica.'

'God of heaven, sirrah! On foot or on mule it is certain death to undertake it.' 'If not certain death, it at least brings a man nearer it than he would go willingly. I warned your worship before

we started that the journey by the pass was no child's play, but you told me that you had a stout heart, and I brought you here.'

There was silence for some minutes; Clifford gazed long and anxiously at the fearful chasm below, and his cheek paled; but still he spoke not.

'Senor,' said the Gitano, coldly, 'the moments are flying fast, and ere an hour be over the senorita will be the spoil of Don Ambrosio.'

The thought brought back the blood in a crimson flush to the brow and cheek of the young soldier, his teeth compressed themselves, his eye lightened, and his whole manner was that of a man determined on a desperate enterprise. 'I expect not to see the sun set,' said he; 'but it matters not; better that my bones should bleach at the bottom of the cliff than that that fair girl should be the prey of you ruffian noble, without my having made at least an effort to save her. So be stirring, Perez, I will face the pass.'

The gipsy nodded, as if in approval; and the two retraced their

steps to the mules.

As soon as they had reached them, Perez began to ungirth the

baggage from the pack animal that carried it.

'What are you about, man?' shouted Clifford; 'what new whim is this in your head?' 'Sees not your worship,' said Perez, in reply, 'that the *tercios*, bulging from her sides, would throw poor Muchacha over the cliff. We must have all on the top of the saddle.'

As he spoke he carefully removed to the back of the animal everything that was likely to catch against the face of the rock and impede its progress. Saddle-bag and haversack, pot and pan, bread, bacon, and onions in their several repositories, were artistically heaped upon each other, and in their lofty and irregular outline gave to the poor brute somewhat the appearance of a camel. This done, the gipsy carefully tightened the girths of his own mule and that of Clifford's, replaced the bridles on their heads, examined minutely bit and stirrup-leather, and, finding all right, prepared to mount.

'And now, senor,' said he, addressing his companion in a tone whose gravity bespoke the importance of the occasion, 'we must not speak together in the pass. We shall have enough to do to keep our heads steady. The Muchacha,' pointing to the pack mule, 'may chance to hesitate on the road. We must place her carefully between us; with the Duchessa behind her, she must go a-head. Muchacha, therefore, will follow the Capitano; while your worship will bring up the rear. And now one word more: keep your feet well under the mule, and your legs close to the saddle; one touch of knee or toe against the rock, and you are a gone man. And, remember, finger gently the bridle. The Duchessa is sure of foot, and knows how to choose her path better than you can guide her. So, now, to the saddle, senor, and hold your rifle in your right hand. There is a sort of attraction in a precipice; and if your head swims, and you get giddy, the weight of the firelock may, perchance, act as a counterpoise, and keep you in your seat.'

The gipsy mounted, and when Clifford had followed his example, looked round with a grave air at the mules and his companion; and then, gently touching the Capitano with the spur, he led the

way in silence towards the rock.

The first part of their progress was simple enough. They followed the line of the cliff, at the foot of which they had been sitting, forced their way through the brushwood, and found themselves near to the precipice, and at the end of the narrow ledge which was to form their path.

On reaching it the leading mule stood still, drew himself up slightly, and snorted as if in terror. The gipsy bent forward, and

patted the animal affectionately on the neck.

'What! Capitano, my old boy, are you frightened? Vaya! It

is nothing. Look at it again.'

The intelligent creature seemed to understand its master's words, for it stretched forth its neck, and, applying its nostrils to the opening of the rocky pathway, snuffed the ground carefully, turning its eyes from right to left, now looking at the rock which formed the right boundary of the roadway, and now at the edge of the precipice on its further side. Apparently the result of the investigation was not satisfactory, for the mule once more raised its head and stood still.

'Ho! Capitano,' said its master, as he carefully followed each movement with his eye, 'do you think the road too narrow? Carao! it is broad enough; look at it again, man;' and once more he patted caressingly the neck of his steed.

Poor Capitano seemed hardly to know what to make of it, for again the nostrils were applied to the ground, and again he snuffed

every inch of the breadth of the roadway.

Probably as he became familiarized with its appearance its dangers diminished, for one fore foot was carefully placed upon the ledge, and then another, till at length, gaining courage as he proceeded, he gave a slight snort, and picking each step as carefully as a cat, entered on the path. Upon his back sat his master, upright as a bolt, and looking for the moment as if he had been converted into stone.

The Muchacha, was, according to Perez's wishes, to come next. The animal was young, and, less acquainted than its companions with the perils of the mountains, was timid from inexperience. As the Capitano entered fully on the path, the pack mule advanced eagerly; but on suddenly arriving at the edge of the cliff, threw itself back on its haunches, uttering at intervals a low whinnying neigh, as if to awaken the sympathy of its master. Perez understood the poor brute, and turned his head.

'Muchacha, my beauty—my love—my charmer, come. It is nothing—positively nothing. Ay, look at it again. I knew you would not be frightened—a brave mule like you, Muchacha. Carao! That's it: bravo, Muchacha. Well done, my bud of beauty.

While Perez had been speaking, the poor animal had been eagerly

examining the path, but not with the calm air of the Capitano. On the contrary, its motions were nervous and rapid. It turned head and eye anxiously from side to side—again and again put one of its fore feet on the ledge—and again and again withdrew it. At last, seemingly forced by the praises of the Gitano, it gathered together its body, as if for a desperate enterprise, and, with knees and hocks bent, and trembling in every limb, entered the narrow roadway, and in another minute had joined its leader.

It was now Clifford's turn, and, fortunately for the nerves of the rider, his mule did not exhibit the same repugnance which had been shown by the others. Probably the instinct of the animal had satisfied it that the pathway, which had been safe for her companions, would be so for her, for, except that on approaching the ledge she, like the others, lowered her head and snuffed the road in its whole breadth, she made but a moment's halt, and, with a calm but careful

step, followed the leading mules.

Her rider was not so self-possessed. At first, indeed, the yawning gulf below turned his head, and made him so giddy, that he had nearly lost his seat. He instinctively shut his eyes, and for some seconds the only thing that recalled him to a consciousness of his actual position was the dull echo of the mule's feet as it picked its steps along the rocky way. By degrees confidence returned. He ventured to open his eyes at intervals, till at length, as his head and vision strengthened, he was able to look around him with a steady glance and unblanched cheek. His struggles had not been unobserved. From time to time Perez had cast back an anxious look at his fellow-traveller; and now, as he saw him sitting firmly in his saddle, and surveying calmly the pass, he sent back to him a smile and a nod of congratulation.

In the mean time the mules proceeded safely along the pathway. They had accomplished two-thirds of their passage, and Clifford was beginning to congratulate himself on the prospect of a speedy termination to his difficulties, when a new danger suddenly forced

itself upon his notice.

The mule which Perez rode had long recovered its perfect self-possession. Its head, which, in the first instance, had almost brushed with its nostrils the roadway, was once more carried erect, and it had resumed its usual firm step. Suddenly its new-born confidence disappeared, and it came to a dead stop. A cry of the Gitano warned the animals behind; and they, too, obedient to their master's voice, at once arrested their steps. The check had been so unexpected, that Clifford was thrown forward; and it was only the lofty front of the Moorish saddle, aided as it was in height by his cloak, which was strapped upon it, that prevented him from being precipitated down the rock. What was the cause of the delay he could not learn, for the mules in front impeded his sight, and he had been forbidden by the gipsy to speak upon the passage.

One thing, however, was evident, and that was that some more than ordinary difficulty had occurred; for he could see distinctly that Perez's mule, with lowered head and arrested steps, was repeating all those pantomimic gestures of terror which it had exhibited on first entering the pass. All at once the Capitano made a sort of a convulsive scramble forward, and, having gone some ten yards in advance, stopped suddenly. The Muchacha followed, but no sooner had she reached the obstacle than she gave a slight scream, and retreated so suddenly that she had nearly thrown Clifford's mule off its legs. The courageous Duchessa, however, kept her footing, and her rider was able to see the cause of the pack mule's terror.

The ledge along which they had been travelling, narrow as it was, had scarcely ever been less than three feet in breadth, and, for the most part, unbroken in its surface. At the point at which they had now arrived a dent had been cut into it. This was of no great width, but as it went nearly up to the face of the crag, it separated entirely one portion of the roadway from the other; while upon either verge of the cleft, the path, as it approached and left it, became more confined, having its side towards the precipice turned up in a sort of rude edging. The cleft itself shot down boldly into the chasm below, and the only mode of passing it was by a scrambling jump; dangerous, not from the breadth to be traversed, but from the slipperiness of the rock under foot, which made it difficult alike to obtain on one side the necessary impetus for the leap, or to arrest suddenly the steps on the other.

The pack mule seemed to be fully alive to the peril, for it steadily refused to advance. It was in vain that Perez, who had turned half round in the saddle, lavished on it alternately praise or abuse. Again and again did the poor animal approach the chasm, and again and again did it draw back in terror, trembling in every limb, and utter-

ing a low plaintive cry.

Half an hour had thus elapsed, and still there was no hope of success.

'We are losing time, Perez,' shouted Clifford, indifferent in the excitement of the moment to his instructions. 'We shall be too late. We must abandon the mules; I can dismount on the side next the rock, and join you on foot.' 'It would be useless,' was the reply. 'We are still a good league from the Bocca Chica, and the best speed of the choris will be necessary to enable us to arrive in time. You must force Muchacha to the leap. At the back of your saddle you will find a whip attached to the crupper; untie it, and then shout and hit hard, and Muchacha must take the jump.'

Clifford did as he was directed. He unloosed the whip, and transferring his rifle to his left hand, prepared to use it, first patting his own mule caressingly on the neck, as if to assure the Duchessa that she was not the offending party, and had nothing to fear from the lash.

'Now, Muchacha,' shouted he, 'get on, lass. Try it, my girl,' and accompanying the words with a blow, he struck heavily with the thong the animal in front. Twice did the poor brute advance, and twice draw back in terror, till at length, maddened by the thong

behind, and encouraged by the coaxing invitations of Perez in front, it rushed at the chasm. It cleared it, but as it landed from the leap, its near hind leg slipped and went over the cliff. The terrified animal made a desperate effort to recover itself, but its shoes found no holding upon the treacherous surface of the rocky causeway, and it sank back towards the precipice. For an instant it hung by its fore legs to the ledge, and then with a scream dropped down into the abyss.

In the meanwhile there was a dead silence, for Perez and Clifford had alike been watching the struggle with feelings of intense agony. Some minutes had elapsed since the ill-fated creature had sunk into the gulph, but not a word was uttered by either of the travellers, and both still sat gazing over the precipice as if they sought in its indistinct depths to learn the fate of their unfortunate companion. The gipsy was the first to awake from his stupor. He passed the back of his hand across his eyes, as if to wipe away a tear, and then turning round addressed himself to Clifford.

'The poor beast is gone,' said he, 'and now it is your worship's turn. May you have better luck. So now for it, senor. Touch the Duchessa gently with the spur, and hold the reins in your hand, so as to assist her in keeping on her legs when she comes down from the leap; but be careful how you use the bit, for it is a powerful one.'

The envoy of Lord Stanhope, like all Englishmen of his rank, was well accustomed to the hunting-field. There are laurels to be gained there as elsewhere, and there is occasionally as much pluck required in a difficult country, as in leading a forlorn hope. Clifford had thus the advantage of experience. Gathering the reins in his left hand, he shook himself loose in the saddle, and struck the Duchessa with the spur. The spirited animal at once obeyed the touch, and advancing with a confident pace, gallantly cleared the chasm. As she landed on the opposite side her fore feet slipped, but the steady hand of her rider recovered her, and in another moment the envoy and his mule were close to the Gitano.

'Bravo, senor,' said Perez. 'Vaya! But that was well done; with practice, I doubt not but you would become as good an arriero as any in Castile. But we must on; in another hundred yards we are safe.'

They accordingly proceeded on their way, and so much is danger an idea of proportion, that in the case of Clifford at least, he continued his route with a feeling of confidence he had not before experienced. After the dangers of the chasm, the narrow ledge, fearful as had been its first appearances, now seemed positively a tolerable roadway. A quarter of an hour's travelling brought them once more to the open ground.

'And now, senor,' said Perez, as they again rode side by side, 'we have no time to lose. That poor devil, Muchacha, has cost us a good half-hour. If we would reach the Bocca Chica in time, we must hurry on with our best speed,' and with the words he struck the

mule with his spurs, and went off at a gallop, followed closely by his companion.

In the mean time the hours had been passing on. The short-lived sun of a November day was sinking fast, and already the shadows of

night began to spread themselves over the forest.

After riding about a league along what seemed the summit of a ridge (for the ground over which they moved was nearly level), the travellers found themselves on the edge of a little valley. It ran nearly parallel with their course, descending gently to the left, and was about fifty yards across. Its surface was carpeted with the finest turf, and free of timber, but on either side the ground rose rapidly, and was studded with forest trees, mixed at intervals with coppice, and the still thick foliage of the chestnut underwood.

There,' said Perez, pointing out to his companion the green line of the little glen, which was seen from the high ground through an opening in the forest, 'there is the Bocca Chica. It runs down to the low country, and is the only by-path in the mountain by which horsemen can reach the highway. We are now within two hundred yards of it, and it is where the main road crosses the head of the valley that we shall find the Andalusian. So take the hood off your locks, and shake the priming loose in your pan, for now comes the time to prove the worth of your rifle.'

In accordance with the instructions to his companion, Perez drew up his mule and removed the covering from his long Spanish gun; while Clifford availed himself of the short halt to chip his flints, and see that everything was in readiness for the emergency.

'And now, senor,' said the gipsy, 'to the road. We are still in

time to defeat the schemes of Don Ambrosio.'

His congratulations seemed ill-timed, for scarcely had the words been spoken, when the sound of fire-arms was heard from the top of the glen. The riders instinctively checked their mules to listen. A pause for an instant followed the report, and then came upon the ear a long wild shriek, in whose heart-rending accents Clifford had no difficulty in recognizing the voice of Therese de Chalais.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE RESCUE.

THE young girl's voice seemed to be recognized by Percz as well as Clifford, and at once dispelled the stupor which had been produced in him by the report of the fire-arms; for, spurring his mule, he left the level ridge which they had hitherto followed, and dashed madly down the bank, shouting to his companion as he went, 'To the Bocca Chica, senor! To the Bocca Chica! They must pass that way.'

Clifford lost no time in obeying the summons, and in a few minutes the two had reached the foot of the hill. When they had arrived almost at the open ground which formed the little valley,

the gipsy jumped off his mule and ran at speed to the edge of the copse, calling to his companion to follow his example. Clifford accordingly threw himself from the saddle, and leaving the animal to join its comrade, hurried forward. In another moment he had joined Perez, who had taken his place beside a large bolderstone, which some convulsion of nature had rolled from the adjacent heights, and which now projected from the copsewood into the open

part of the glen.

Scarcely had they reached it, when, by the indistinct twilight, some figures were seen appearing in the distance. As they approached. Perez and Clifford had no difficulty in recognizing the Andalusian and his companions of the hostelry. They were not alone, and their accompaniments bore sad testimony to the success of their enterprise. The party moved slowly, as if without fear of pursuit. One of the inferior robbers came first, carrying across the crupper of his horse some large packages, which it required no vivid imagination to comprehend were part of the loading of the baggagemules. The ruffian who followed led one of the pack animals by its halter, and upon its back sat a young girl, who, from the motionless and rigid fashion of her person, was evidently bound to the saddle. Last of all came Don Ambrosio; partly, probably, because, in the event of an attempt at rescue or escape, he had more confidence in his own powers of defeating either than in those of his comrades: and partly because the mule, unwilling to leave its companions, moved sulkily along, and could at intervals be pressed forward only by the lash being applied to it behind.

Clifford took in the cavalcade and its arrangements at a glance. 'Let the first scoundrel alone,' said he. 'The baggage may go. I will take the fellow who is leading the mule, and you can deal with Don Ambrosio.'

Perez nodded, and the short clean click of the locks was the only

thing that broke the silence.

In the mean time the horsemen came leisurely down the glen. The first, with the baggage on his crupper, was allowed to pass by. As the second came opposite Clifford, the rifle was slowly raised to his shoulder; for awhile the piece vibrated slightly, and then was motionless. At the same instant came its clear, sharp crack upon the ear. The aim had been true. The ruffian had been hit in the head; but, except the *thud*, as sportsmen term it, or the dull crash of the striking ball, there was no sound. The man fell like a sack of lead upon the turf, and the terrified animal that had carried him rushed wildly into the forest.

Almost at the same moment Perez had fired at Don Ambrosio, but his aim had not been so happy, for the Andalusian, who at the report of Clifford's gun had suddenly checked his horse, no sooner saw the fate of his comrade than he struck spurs into Black Roderick, and galloped fiercely down the glen. Once more Clifford raised his rifle, but again the good genius of the Andalusian preserved him, for he sat firm and uninjured. Yet the ball had not gone scathless:

it struck the horse in its side. The noble steed jumped convulsively into the air, and then resumed its wild gallop, as if the bullet had only given to it a fiercer impetus. It was but for a moment, however; for all at once the animal dropped dead, flinging, as it fell, its master violently on the turf. Clifford and his companion had eagerly watched its progress, and no sooner had the horse fallen than Perez drew his knife from his bosom and rushed towards Don Ambrosio. He was again unsuccessful. For more than a minute, indeed, the Andalusian had remained stunned with the fall, but his limbs had been uninjured, and as soon as his scattered senses sufficiently returned to enable him to comprehend his situation, he betook himself to his feet, and ere the gipsy could traverse the distance which separated them, had managed to stagger to the brushwood which bounded the ravine, and was soon safe from pursuit amidst its recesses.

In the mean time, Clifford, dropping his weapon, hurried towards the unhappy Therese. She had become stupified by the fearful extent of the misfortune which had overtaken her, and though the fresh report of the fire-arms to a certain extent roused her from her apathy, terror prevented her understanding the efforts that were being made in her favour; and it was only when Clifford approached her, and his well-known voice sounded in her ear, that she became conscious she was saved. The shock, even joyful as it was, was too much for her agitated nerves, and with an hysterical shriek she flung her arms round his neck, and dropped her head on his shoulder.

It is not of frequent occurrence that a young man is embarrassed by a beautiful girl's cheek being pressed against his, but it was so with Clifford. It was in vain that he attempted to soothe the feelings of the sufferer with words of consolation. It was in vain he essayed to detach the fair arms from his neck. The poor girl seemed to fancy that they were dragging her from her only friend, and at each effort to remove them only clasped him more convulsively. The unconscious caress had from its associations become intensely painful, and Clifford eagerly welcomed the approach of Perez, who, on losing sight of Don Ambrosio, returned to his master. With his aid, the cords were cut which bound Mademoiselle de Chalais to the saddle, and she was lifted to the side of a little rill which meandered along the valley.

The plentiful application of its waters to her face and temples rapidly restored consciousness; her senses returned, a violent burst of tears followed, and becoming once more composed, she professed herself able to rejoin her party. She would have walked, but her limbs refused to support her; and Clifford, after a feebly muttered dissent, took her in his arms and slowly made his way up the glen to the high road.

Thither Perez had preceded them, eager alike to announce the recovery of Mademoiselle de Chalais, and to ascertain the extent of the disaster which had overtaken her servants. He found, as he expected, the party in great disorder, and the ground strewed with

drapery and mule-bags roughly forced open. The more serious outrage had left behind fewer painful results than he had anticipated. A baggage-mule had been shot dead; another bullet had broken the arm of one of the mule-boys; and the Nestor of the party, he of the peaked beard and long rapier, had had his head broken by the butt-end of a firelock, which had knocked the said head's dignified proprietor from his mule; but beyond that there was little damage done. The duenna, indeed, had fainted on the first attack of the robbers, and had signalised the recovery of her senses by a Jeremiad, in which lamentations for the loss of her charge, and of her finery, were strangely mingled; but the appearance of Perez, with the joyful intelligence of which he was the bearer, soon restored her to the little rationality she possessed. By her, and by the whole party, the gipsy was received with acclamations, which were redoubled as Clifford and his fair burden made their appearance.

As soon as the noisy congratulations were subsided, all set to work to repair the damage, and place matters on their former footing. The scattered habiliments were collected together, the bales repacked, and Perez once more hurried down the glen to bring up the mules, which had been left in the wood. When the baggage was arranged, preparations began to be made for resuming their journey. But in this a difficulty occurred. Therese positively refused to enter the litter. Probably the recollections connected with it had affected her nerves; but whatever were the cause it was in vain that her attendants repeated their entreaties. The young lady was obstinate. She would walk to the post-house.

'It is morally impossible, senorita,' said the gipsy; 'Buitrago

is a good league off, and the roads are miry.'

His efforts, like those of the others, were unsuccessful. At length a compromise was effected. Therese consented to ride Clifford's mule. The arrangements were then rapidly proceeded with. The abigail transferred her respectable spinsterhood to her mistress's litter, and took her place opposite the duenna; while the wounded muleteer was lifted into that which had been hitherto occupied by the ancient waiting-woman. The baggage belonging to the dead mule was placed on that of Don Dicgo's lieutenant, while the worthy caballero was left to walk on foot. As to the Master of the Horse himself, thanks to the thickness of his skull, he had so far recovered from the blow given by the butt-end of Don Ambrosio's gun, as to be able to sit on the back of his steed, and there he was placed by the joint efforts of his colleagues. All was now ready. For greater security, Clifford and Perez reloaded their fire-arms, and the former having given his carbine to be carried by the gipsy, addressed himself to the care of his fair companion.

Taking his mantle, he folded and arranged it carefully on the broad Spanish saddle of the Duchessa, and on this he placed Therese. But the position was no secure one, and the events of the last hour had robbed the rider of the self-possession necessary to enable her, unaided, to retain it; and so many slippings and half-stifled cries attended the recommencement of the journey, that her newly-constituted guardian had nothing left for it but to pass his arm round his companion and steady her on her seat. No opposition was offered. It is probable that her recent terrors were still too vivid to allow her to think of the minor conventionalities, for she was, or at least appeared to be, unconscious of a position which at another moment would have been productive of so much blushing and embarrassment.

In the meanwhile the party moved onwards, and in about an hour reached the inn.

The hostelry of Buitrago was nearly in the centre of the Somo Sierra, but on its southern side. The wild country had long been without a sufficient refuge for travellers, and one of the first acts of the first king of the new race, after he had been securely placed upon

his throne by the peace of Utrecht, was to create one.

Philip V. was a true Bourbon, and inherited from his grandfather, Louis XIV., all his passion for roads, bridges, and buildings. In accordance with this, to facilitate his communication with his paternal kingdom, he had built near the summit of the range an inn of a larger and better description than the hostelries usually found on the Spanish roads, and had added a barrack in which were quartered some half-dozen Miquelets, or police, as a check on the savage population of the mountain district.

But though the monarch had, by the expenditure of public money, erected a tenement amply sufficient in the number and size of its rooms for the wants of the wayfarers, the internal decorations and furnishing were necessarily left to the tenant; and here, as elsewhere, both exhibited all that scantiness of luxury, or even necessaries, which is so universally regretted by Spanish travellers.

As soon as they had reached it, Therese withdrew to her chamber; and Clifford, true to the smuggling character he affected, followed the rest of the party to the kitchen, where the events of the day's journey became to the numerous guests, who already occupied it, the subject of eager discussion.

Supper was over, the last morsel of the puchero was exhausted, and the larger portion of the occupants of the chamber lay stretched upon the ground wrapped in their brown mantles, and smoking their paper cigars, or asleep.

Clifford was not among the number. To say the truth, notwithstanding his fatigues, the incidents of the last four-and-twenty hours were sufficiently eventful to prevent his retiring to his night's quarters in one of the numerous bedchambers which the bounty of the king had provided, and which had been reserved for him.

On the preceding night, as our readers have probably guessed, he had held a long conference with Perez, and had informed his guide of his having been present at his interview with Don Ambrosio—of the instructions of the Andalusian for laming the mules—of the spot in which the attack was to take place, and more especially of

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the acquaintance possessed by the dissolute noble with the young lady's name, and his intention not to confine the outrage to robbery. The Gitano had listened to all in a manner which exhibited a strangely mingled interest in the senorita, and terror for the threats of his old enemy. He at length, on the repeated remonstrances of Clifford, had undertaken to attempt a rescue by guiding his companion through a pass in the mountains, which diminished by one-half the length of the road, but on the condition that Clifford should carefully avoid exhibiting any consciousness of the arranged plan, and should, on the appearance of the lame mules in the morning, affect the most violent anger at the delay. This he had promised to do, and as our readers are aware faithfully kept his word.

So far things had gone well; but now that the excitement was over, all the half-disclosed knowledges, which had lately come crowding on him, rose to his mind, and suggested ample food for reflection. He recollected that Don Ambrosio had expressed a knowledge of the young lady's name, and that this circumstance, when mentioned to the Gitano, had more than all others excited the terrors of his guide. What was that name? It was evidently not Mademoiselle de Chalais, for by such an appellation the senorita had been frequently spoken of by her attendants in the presence of Don Ambrosio and the other inmates of the hostelry, and that long prior to the interview under the chestnut-tree. No: the Andalusian had never been out of Spain. The name with which he was acquainted must be her Spanish one—that which she and her duenna had ever carefully kept secret—and Clifford felt satisfied that this mysterious designation must be known to the Gitano. Again and again during their day's ride he had made an effort to learn it, but Perez had always found an excuse for eluding a reply; he was either pressing forward or hanging back, or calling to the baggage mule, or, in short, doing anything but what was required of him. The difficulties connected with their hurried journey had for the moment prevented his young master pressing an answer, but now he determined to force one from his guide.

And what, it may be asked, was the reason of his anxiety to learn a matter in which he was so little interested? The blush of honest indignation rises to our cheeks while we write that the representative of two powerful kingdoms was in the fair way to love or lunacy. Alas! that the symptoms of both should be precisely identical. When a creature of clay, with a thousand imperfections, bends in adoration before another creature of clay, imperfect like himself—when he doats on cheeks ere long to wrinkle, and worships eyes which soon must lose their lustre—when he sacrifices fame, and position, and wealth, the most substantial blessings of life, and its richest prizes, for the fleeting favour of a smile—what is all this but madness? And yet what is this but the history of human passion?

And Clifford was no wiser than his fellows. Scarce eight days had elapsed since his meeting with Therese at Irun, and already he loved her as if he had known her from his childhood. Nor after all

was it otherwise than natural. Life, to measure it justly, should be counted not by minutes but by sensations. There are worthy folks in the world, with cold sympathies and good digestions, who but eat and sleep, rise and go to bed. To such, the record of each day is but the stereotyped history of that which precedes and of that which follows it; and their existence, though it may be spun out to the allotted threescore years and ten, is, in fact, but of a four-and-twenty hours' duration.

How different had been the career of Clifford since he had known Therese de Chalais! Into the short period of their acquaintanceship had been crowded incidents sufficient for half a century. The unexplained mode in which he had been attached to her party—her mysterious connection with the Gitano—her brilliant beauty—her high-bred manners—her conversation, ever affecting ignorance of the world's notabilities, and ever exhibiting a knowledge of them—their loiterings together by the wayside during the time of their mid-day halts—the robbers, the danger, the rescue; and more than all, the interest which he could not help thinking she had taken in his fortunes, had each contributed their fascinations to an extent which had in vain been combated by his philosophy.

Repeatedly had he whispered to himself that the fair lady might be an adventuress; that with his person, his talent, his connections, he might make a brilliant marriage. Nay more, that Lord Clifford would probably refuse his consent to any that was not in accordance with the distinguished prospects of his son. It was of no avail. The image of Therese kept its ground; till at length the young visionary began to reconcile himself to what he felt was an inevitable destiny; and to endeavour to discover some apology for the folly which, like other coming events, was casting its shadows

before.

'If I could learn,' said he to himself, 'this girl's name, it might be that her family and herself are such as my father would approve. I must, by hook or by crook, get it out of that scoundrel Perez. And now I think of it, I wonder where the rascal can be;—strange I do not recollect having seen him during the whole of the

evening :

With the thought he started from his chair, and proceeded in search of his guide. The expedition was not destined to be successful. Perez was not in the kitchen. Nor, though the mules were in the stalls, could any trace of him be found in the stable. Tired with his unavailing search within, he went beyond the outer door. The front of the posada was untenanted. He turned the angle of the wall, and at a little distance thought he observed, lurking near the inn, a figure resembling that of the Gitano. He was possibly in error, for though he hailed the man no answer was returned. Yet there was reason to suspect that his signal had been heard, for the figure stole away amongst the trees. Once more he shouted, but this time at least he met with a reply, for a soft sweet voice addressed him from the balcony overhead.

# CHAPTER XIV.

### A DECLARATION.

THERESE, for the voice was hers, seemed at first agitated, but she speedily regained self-possession, and with a laugh, whose clear silver tones showed that she had already forgotten, or at least had entirely recovered from the effects of the evening's adventures, she said, 'What ails Don Carlos?' 'Is it you, senorita?' replied Clifford, 'I fancied I saw in the distance Perez, my muleteer, and I called him. But what seek you in the balcony? I doubted not that ere now you had retired to rest.'

'I might have done so,' said his companion in a pettish tone, 'had I not been hoping for the last two hours that some folks might have the politeness to inquire if I had suffered from the events of

this dreadful day.'

'If it be to me the senorita alludes,' said Clifford, 'I pray of you to attribute my absence to respect. It is not befitting a contrabandista to seek audience of a great lady like Mademoiselle de Chalais.'

'Nothing could be better worded, fair sir, or more humbly spoken. But I will not raise you from your humility. I will still be the arand dame, and you but my vassal; and as such I now command you to my presence. There is a certain old lady of my acquaintance who would be shocked at such an idea, and still more at my boldness in expressing it, but the rules which regulate society in courtly coteries—that paradise which she worships at a distance—are unknown in the Somo Sierra. Besides, my monitress has been asleep this half hour, so most humble contrabandista you may approach; and bring your cloak with you, for, to confess the truth, my hall of audience is somewhat scantily furnished.'

Clifford required no second invitation. In an instant he had reentered the stable, and hurried up the steps which led from it to the upper apartment. The top of the staircase opened on the end of a long corridor, but there was no difficulty in finding the way. A door was slightly ajar, and the narrow ray of light which streamed

through it conducted him to his destination.

The room which Therese occupied was of considerable size, but its sole furniture was a brazier heaped with charcoal, a common deal table, and a solitary arm-chair of equally coarse workmanship—the seat which had been provided for her duenna-companion, had probably followed her to her sleeping-room. The only ornament of the apartment was a long-stemmed brass lamp, similar to those in common use in Italy, and derived like them from the Roman model. It stood upon the table, but had been pushed back to its extreme edge, it might be for the purpose of throwing the fair girl's face into the shade. Therese, notwithstanding the gaiety of the tone affected in the balcony, seemed once more nervous and excited.

'Good evening to your worship,' said she in a hurried voice, as if

anxious to take the initiative in the conversation, 'you have brought your mantle with you, and like Duke Robert of Normandy (for you must know that I claim to be half Norman by descent), you must make a seat of it. But you are but a contrabandista, senor,' continued she, glancing at him with eyes full of malicious meaning,

'and why do I speak to you of the Dukes of Normandy!'

'I am but a contrabandista, Donna Teresa,' replied her companion, with assumed humility, 'and know nothing of the caballero you speak of; but if the cloak which he threw on the ground for a seat, were as ragged as my jacket, it was scarce worth the picking up when he went away:' and he glanced with well-acted despair at the dress which, torn almost to tatters, bore sad evidence of the brushwood of the Somo Sierra.

The lady half-closed her eyes, pursed up her mouth, and raised

her hands and shoulders in silent sympathy.

'It is positively heartrending to think of it,' said she, as she pretended to wipe away a tear. 'What a fine jacket it was; and of the best Genoa velvet too—I am a judge of velvets! And all destroyed; and yet—even had it reached Madrid in safety—I doubt if it had been worn again.'

'And why?' 'Oh! merely a fancy of mine.'

'You forget, Donna Teresa, that it is the dress of my profession.' It may be of a contrabandista's, but I thought you might

possibly change your trade.'

'You would allege—' 'Merely that the first nobles in Spain occasionally don the gay plumage of the Majo for the purpose of disguise, and I deemed it not unlikely that Don Carlos might follow their example.'

The remark, and still more the tone in which it was uttered,

recalled in a moment all Clifford's gravity.

'You mistake, madam,' said he, in a cold tone. 'With them the adoption of the dress is a matter of amusement; with me it is the distinctive feature of my trade, and of those who follow it.'

'You carry then forbidden wares across the frontiers.' 'True,

madam. I am a contrabandista.'

'And you deal, of course, in silks and laces, and velvets and tobacco. Do you never carry anything else?' 'Are there any other goods that would repay the risk?'

The two looked into each other's eyes. There was something of malice in the lady's glance, but her companion met it calm and self-

possessed.

'It is strange,' said she at length, 'what odd fancies women take. I have dreamt at times that you are no smuggler.' 'And why?'

'I can scarcely tell; but it seems to me that smugglers, for the most part, know only shopkeepers and venteros—their doings and their looks—while you are not only acquainted with the political history of Europe, but with the persons, the virtues, the weaknesses, the manners, the dress of its great men and noble women. Yet such minor traits of character are only revealed to those who

have mixed with them.' 'It was precisely the observation that I was about to make,' said Clifford. 'Nothing has so much gratified me, as that I should have had the power of adding to my limited knowledge of such topics, by enjoying the society of a lady, whose minuteness of information is evidence, as she has justly remarked, that she has mixed habitually with the brilliant scenes, and among the distinguished personages, she describes so well. A lady, too, who has possessed such admirable opportunities of knowing them intimately, for has she not a burgomaster for her relative, and spent her life in the capital of France—in the Marais?'

Therese laughed and coloured.

'Parried not amiss, senor contrabandista,' said she. 'So you think—' 'That Spanish ladies, like Spanish gentlemen, sometimes adopt the Majo dress.'

'I am not in masquerade.' 'There are deeper disguises than

the colour of the saya, or the draping of the mantilla.'

'You doubt therefore—' 'That you have lived all your life in the Marais.'

'What monstrous incredulity! You would allege then that we are both deceptions?' 'That you, at least, are no burgomaster's granddaughter.'

'And you?'

Clifford, instead of replying, began to pace the room. He was evidently under the influence of some strong internal emotion. It seemed as if prudence and passion were contending for the mastery.

Therese remarked his agitation with a smile.

'Come, senor contrabandista,' said she, 'you have not yet answered my question. You say that I am a deception. What are you?'

Clifford stood still for a moment, and then advanced hurriedly towards his fair companion, as if some sudden feeling, overpowering in its intensity, had brought him, in spite of himself, to her side.

You ask me,' said he, in a low tone, 'what I am. Precisely what I represent myself, your vassal, your slave. Yes, Donna Teresa,' continued he, as he flung himself upon his knees beside her chair, 'whatever may be the apparent contradictions between my acquaintance with society, and the trade I am compelled to follow for the moment, in this at least there is no deception. I love you. I worship you. From the first moment that I saw you at Irun, I felt myself bound to your service by a sympathy over which I had no control. There were interests belonging to others—interests, of the magnitude of which you can have no conception—which I was bound first to have attended to, and yet I neglected them—neglected all that duty and honour should have compelled me to remember, in order that I might comply with your request to watch over your safety. And have I not done so? Ah! Donna Teresa, you avert your head. Have you already forgotten the Bocca Chica?'

'No, no, Don Carlos,' replied she, with downcast eyes, as if unable or unwilling to meet the impassioned glance of her lover, 'I never

can: I never will forget it. But you forget,' and she paused for a moment, and then added, 'the difference of your rank and mine.'

'Alas!' said he, bitterly, 'I do not forget it, but I had hoped that the service I had rendered you, might have banished it from your memory. And yet the difference may not be so great; for I know not your position, and mine may be higher than you think of: but even if it were otherwise, is there aught to make impossible the ties of affection? If I were but a mere contrabandista, I have at least youth, health, and the consciousness of a powerful will; and would you but allow me to hope for the possession of this fair hand, I promise you that the day will come, and that ere long, that I shall make myself one whom you can acknowledge without a blush. Will you not, Donna Teresa, give me that hope?' And he grasped the unresisting fingers, and pressed them passionately to his lips.

For some time Therese sat motionless. Her head was averted and bent down, for it rested on her left hand. She replied at length, but in a tremulous voice, 'It is impossible, Don Carlos. You build up in your dreams an edifice which can never be realised. Even if my own feelings were for a moment such as to make me listen to you with pleasure, its only result would be to bring misery on me. without in the slightest degree advancing your prospects. I am not my own mistress. My future lot is entirely dependent on the will of an aged relative. Who he is I may not tell; but I may say this, that he is rich, proud, violent in his prejudices, and a slave to the educational feelings of his rank: more than all, he has an iron will: and be assured of this, that he would never consent to give you my hand, even if you were all that your fondest dreams whisper that you may become.'

'And do you,' said her lover, with passionate eagerness, 'in a matter so momentous to life's happiness, consent to be led passively like a sacrifice to the altar, or would you for a moment allow (pardon the expression) the will of a bigoted old man to decide for you in a matter which should be left solely to the guidance of your own affections? You say he is rich. What would have been the value of his riches without his child? And what Therese, dearest Therese. would that child have been now, had my hand been less steady and

my eye less true?'

The poor girl shuddered.

'You speak as if you were his property,' continued her lover in a hurried tone. 'It is false. You are mine. I have won you, as his forefathers may have won their brides of old, by my bow and by my spear; but only dear, dear Therese, to restore to you the liberty you lost, and to give you the power of bestowing it upon him whom your heart dictates should be its possessor. Have I no claim upon that heart? Does it feel no gratitude?

Therese made no reply. Weeping had choked utterance, and the

heaving of the bosom indicated strong emotion.

'Will you not answer me?' said her lover, as again and again he

pressed his impassioned lips to the fingers that were passively abandoned to him. 'Will you not say, at least, that I may hope?'

Again there was a pause, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the convulsive sobbing of the young girl, and faster than

ever did the tears stream down on fingers and cheek.

All at once there came from beneath the window, a low mournful cry, like the note of an owl. It seemed instantaneously to recall the fair tenant of the chamber to consciousness, for she started up, and clasping her hands wildly, she exclaimed, 'No more of this, senor; I pray you no more of this, and leave me. I beseech you—not a word now, but go at once—at once.'

Clifford, too, had sprung to his feet, but there was so much anxiety in his companion's face that he had not the cruelty to disobey her. He moved towards the door. Once more he would have lingered, but an impatient gesture warned him to depart, and

slowly, and with unwilling steps, he left the room.

Confused, stupified, and staggering like a drunken man under the excitement of his feelings, he reached the end of the corridor, and there, unable to proceed further, sank back into a dark nook and leant against the wall. A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, when he was recalled from his trance by stealthy steps upon the staircase. Two men passed him. They moved noiselessly along the passage, and stopped at Therese's room. The door once more opened, and by the light from the interior the young soldier saw enter, followed by a man wrapped in a large mantle, Perez the Gitano.

# CHAPTER XV

#### THE ZINCALI.

It is difficult to describe the astonishment of Clifford at the apparition of Perez. During the course of the journey, several circumstances, as we have already mentioned, had contributed to excite suspicions that his fair fellow-traveller and the Gitano were not so unacquainted with each other as they had professed to be—suspicions which, in the last few hours, had assumed the shape of certainty. And yet, what could be the bond between the beautiful, and notwithstanding her disclaimer, as Clifford suspected, the highborn girl and the muleteer?

The Gitanos were the vagabonds of Spain. There, as elsewhere, they were wanderers on the face of the earth. The larger portion of them spent their time in roving over plain or forest, keeping, for the most part, at a distance from the great towns, and confining their visits to the smaller villages, where they were less in dread of the law and its officers—the men professing the trades of black-smith or tinsmith, and buying and selling mules and horses—the women acting as fortune-tellers, or as the convenient go-betweens in love affairs.

The two professions gave them influence with both sexes. If a great noble wanted a horse of surpassing beauty, it was to the gipsy jockey that he applied to procure it. If a Spanish dame or demoiselle wished, without the knowledge of husband or father, to send a letter to the object of her affections, it was the gipsy woman, who with her basket of ribands and laces was admitted into every house, that was employed as the messenger. But though used, they were not trusted, except in so far as their interests made them trustworthy: and cringing and fair-spoken though they might be with persons of power, it was generally understood that they entertained, in secret, an intense hatred to their Christian fellow-countrymen, and did not hesitate to murder, without scruple, any unfortunate traveller who chanced to fall into their hands in the wild regions which are so common in Castile, and which formed their favourite haunts.

With all these circumstances, Clifford, from his long residence in Spain, was necessarily well acquainted, and the knowledge served the more to confuse his speculations with regard to Donna Teresa and Perez. That the gipsy might be employed by the young lady was simple enough. She might be rich, and the services of the Zincali were always to be bought with gold. But what more especially excited his wonder was how Mademoiselle de Chalais, who, from the purity of her accent, was probably a French woman, or who, at least, from her residence at Paris, was intimately versant with the sayings and doings of the French Court and French society. could have formed any acquaintance with one of a race which belonged to a distant land and was so generally marked with obloquy. And even if this could be explained, what was entirely beyond his comprehension was the still more extraordinary fact that she had contrived to create in her own favour a passionate devotion in the bosom of one of a people which notoriously never extended their sympathies beyond the pale of their own society. Yet such a fact was indisputable. It had been authenticated by the anxiety shown by Perez in his conference with Don Ambrosio, and he had since given proof that the sentiment was no passing or doubtful emotion. for to save the young girl he had twice risked his life,—at the cliff and at the Bocca Chica. Such were some of the speculations which floated across the mind of Clifford as he lay on his couch; but the day's journey had been severe, its events exciting, and exhausted nature at length sunk to sleep.

His slumbers were long and deep. The fatigue had of course no small share in producing them; but what probably no less contributed, was the unwonted solitude of his chamber; for the new inn of Philip V. had been able to offer a private apartment, where neither the restlessness of his fellows in the kitchen, nor the noise of the mules in the neighbouring stable, had as of old disturbed his repose.

When he awoke the sun was already high in the heavens. Astonished at the neglect of the Gitano to summon him, he hurried

on his clothes and proceeded to the door. It was locked. With an impatient fist he thundered against its panels, and shouted loudly for release. The clamour seemed at length to awaken attention, the sounds of approaching steps were heard, a key turned, and the sub-officer in command of the small body of Miquelets or police entered the room.

'Senor caballero,' said he, 'it was by my order that your door was fastened. It is necessary for me to report to my superior, the corregidor at San Agustin, the outrage which took place yesterday, and however painful it may be to me to delay you on your journey, I must take your evidence with regard to the identity of the robber that was shot at the Bocca Chica. I have already sent off my men with some peasants to bring back the body. When it arrives, and the forms that justice require are gone through, you will be allowed to depart.'

Clifford, however much he might be irritated by the new delay, had, of course, no alternative but to submit, and in search of breakfast make his way into the kitchen. As he passed through the stable, to his surprise he remarked that it was nearly empty. Of its well-filled stalls only two were occupied, and these were tenanted by the mules of the Gitano. Still more astonished, he shouted 'Perez!' with an angry voice, and in an instant the gipsy ap-

peared.

'Scoundrel!' said Clifford to him, in an angry tone, 'why have I been permitted to sleep so long? It is already late, and we should have started at least three hours back.' 'The commander of the Miquelets gave orders that your worship was not to be disturbed, and I had no choice but to obey him.'

'And what has become of the other inhabitants of the posada?'

'The arrieros started at daybreak.'

'The arrieros, fool!' shouted his angry master; 'what care I for the muleteers? I spoke of Mademoiselle de Chalais.' 'The

senorita also left ere the sun was well above the horizon.

'Gone!' muttered Clifford to himself, in unutterable astonishment. 'Gone! after the service I have rendered her, and without bidding me adieu! It is impossible!' 'Yes, senor,' repeated the Gitano, in a quiet tone; 'the senorita went, as I said, at daybreak, and the officer here gave her two of his men as a protection as far as San Agustin. She sleeps there to-night.'

'And how far is San Agustin?' 'Eight leagues, senor.'

'I can reach it then, this evening?' 'Easily, your worship. If we get away an hour after midday we can manage it well enough, and, I doubt not, by that time Don Balthasar, the officer in command here, will have no further need of your worship's presence.'

'I must see her again,' thought Clifford, as he turned abruptly from his companion and sauntered into the forest: 'I must see that girl once more. Strange that I, who have beheld unmoved, the handsomest women of the handsomest courts of Europe, should, on

a few days' acquaintance, fall so madly in love with one whose position is so ambiguous, and of whose very country I am ignorant. Her French is as pure as if she had never left the Quartier St. Germain; but then, her Spanish is as good as her French; and had she not addressed me in the latter language, I should have sworn to her being a born Madrilena. She calls herself, too, Mademoiselle de Chalais. The name is noble-most noble; sixteen quarterings at the least in the escutcheon; for the Prince de Chalais is a nephew of the Princess of Ursins, and she was a Tremouille. Ha! a thought strikes me. The princess was the friend of my mother, and for twelve long years the mistress of the Spanish monarchy. Can there be any connection between the ambitious woman whose whims agitated Europe, and my fellow-traveller? But no, it is impossible; and yet, notwithstanding the evident absurdity of the thought, there are circumstances that would almost make me believe in it. Ah! Donna Teresa, you escape me not again so easily. When we meet this evening I will solve the doubt; and then—and then '-and he once more turned his steps towards the inn, indulging as he went in a thousand speculations, amongst which was one, as to whether his father, the proud Lord Clifford, might consider a relative of a French princess of sufficiently high birth to be the bride of a son of his own far-descended

It was about an hour after noon before Clifford and Perez were able to resume their journey Fortunately, however, the posada in which they had passed the night, though near the summit of the range, was on its southern side, and the easy descent offered no

obstacle to their rapid progress.

Little conversation passed between them. The incidents of the preceding night had, as we have mentioned, aroused suspicion; and Clifford continued his route in silence, now meditating on the events which had connected a being so beautiful with one of the wild race to which his guide belonged, and now endeavouring to discover the cause of the interest which she took in himself and his movements. The vanity of his age would occasionally whisper that the lady's machinations had no other source than a plot on his own attractive person; but then came the recollection of the scene at Irun. At that time he was utterly unknown to his fair companion, and there must have been some stronger reason than mere fancy for the manner in which she attached him to her party, or rather, to speak with less gallantry but more truth, had forced herself upon his society.

What increased his doubts was the fact, that two or three times an occasional slip of the tongue, or forgetfulness of manner, seemed to intimate that Donna Teresa was aware that he was not the person he affected to be. Of his political mission, conducted as it had been with such anxious attention to secresy, it seemed impossible that she could know anything; but, still, in a hostile country, the mere discovery of his being no contrabandista, however little his

real character might be suspected, was pregnant with danger and

productive of anxiety.

The mood of the gipsy was equally taciturn. He too appeared to have given himself up to his own thoughts. It might be the loss of the pack-mule and the unlucky escape of Don Ambrosio occupied him, or it might be that he anticipated the doubts entertained by his master of his infidelity, and feared, by entering upon conversation, to provoke questions which he might find it inconvenient to reply to. Whatever was the cause, he also was silent, and the two pursued their journey, in manner at least unconscious of each other's presence.

After about four hours' riding, the travellers approached the foot of the range. They had already left behind them its steeper passes, and had entered the broken ground which so invariably forms the outskirts of a mountain chain. The route followed by the wayfarers occasionally partook of these inequalities, and, as it held its straight undeviating course through the tumbled country, rose and fell with the undulations which it traversed. For the last half-league the track had led across a plain, which formed a sort of miniature tableland. The level ground itself was free from timber, but its edges fell down precipitously towards the water-courses which bounded it, and they were thickly studded with forest and brushwood.

It was into one of the beds of these mountain torrents, that the Gitana and his master were descending about nightfall. The road had been cut deep into the bank, and its narrow way offered little more than sufficient room for the passage of the mules. The cautious animals were moving slowly down the steep declivity, the reins were upon their necks, and Clifford, forgetful of everything around him, was deeply sunk in meditation, when his musings were disagreeably broken.

The brushwood seemed at once instinct with life, and some two or three dozen of half-naked gipsy children stole from the bushes on either side, and crowding around him, asked for charity. As Clifford advanced, they were joined by lads and women; the men of the tribe in turn made their appearance, till at length a mob

amounting to nearly a hundred filled the road.

With their numbers the confidence of the beggars seemed to increase. The low whine with which they had at first addressed a claim for alms, was gradually exchanged for shrill mocking cries or open manaces, while some bolder than the rest, took hold of the bridles of the mules, or clung to the stirrup-leathers. The last acts seemed to awaken Clifford to a sense of his danger, for he struck the Duchessa with the spur, and shouted to his companion—

'Ho! Perez, the scoundrels are likely to prove troublesome. Out with your knife, man, while I send a bullet through the head of the

fellow who is trying to stop my way.'

Clifford suited the action to the word, and was drawing with his right hand a pistol from his belt, when his movements were interrupted from a quarter which he had not anticipated. Perez, as if

for safety, had brought his mule close alongside of his companion, but instead of responding to the appeal in the manner expected, suddenly flung his arms round him, and, ere the envoy of Lord Stanhope was able to free himself from the hostile grasp, a dozen powerful hands had seized upon body and limb, and in another instant a mule-girth, which had been kept in readiness, was passed over his head and buckled tight behind his back. As soon as he had been rendered helpless, his rifle and pistols were taken from him, and a cord, passed round his waist, was attached to the rings of his Moorish saddle, and fastened him to the seat. Having thus made defence or escape alike impossible, his captors hurriedly left the main road, and following the course of the mountain torrent, whose ford had witnessed the catastrophe, struck into the forest.

### CHAPTER XVI.

### THE MOORISH TOWER.

THE party continued their way at a rapid pace. After ascending the river for about a mile they turned to the left, moving in a south-westerly direction, and in a line somewhat parallel to the public road, but still, notwithstanding the increasing darkness and the occasional density of the forest, with a rapidity and decision which marked their familiarity with the ground they were traversing.

After about an hour's travelling there appeared on the right some lofty towers, which rose above the trees, and from their massiveness and great elevation were seen distinctly enough against the sky. Towards these the party bent their way. On mounting a gentle ascent, the pathway conducted them to a piece of open turf, probably the site of the barbican of ancient times, and the exerciseground of the castle chivalry. Beyond was the main front of the building.

It was of great extent, and, as far as the uncertain light enabled Clifford to judge, one of those feudal structures of the middle ages. which, alternately possessed by Goth and Moor, retained traces of the architectural tastes of its various masters; now frowning heavily in some donjon keep, and now flaunting against the sky in one of the long, slender, minaret-capped towers, which characterize the edifices of the Saracenic era.

The entrance to it was by a gateway still entire, and through this, after crossing a fosse green with grass, the prisoner was led into the courtyard within. A buzz of voices had prepared him for its being tenanted, but the numbers of the occupants went far beyond his calculations. The great court had been built after the mode which the heat of the climate seems to have suggested in all ages and countries to the inhabitants of the south. It was surrounded by a series of arcades, over which projected the rooms on the first story. The ground-floor originally had probably been intended for exercise in winter season, and protection from the sun in the summer. It now

formed the head-quarters of a gipsy tribe, which had taken advantage of the shelter of the arched stonework, and whose numerous fires gleaming here and there amid the darkness, and partially seen through the groups that surrounded them, gave a picturesque character to the locality.

As soon as the party escorting Clifford had passed the gateway they checked his mule. They then unbound the cords which had fastened him to the saddle, and having placed him on the ground, led him up a spiral stair which occupied the interior of a circular tower at one of the angles of the courtvard. There were doors on the first and second floor, but his guides paused at neither. At length, on reaching the highest story, the party halted before a portal thickly studded with large iron nails, and which, from its opening not from the great staircase, but from the top of some halfdozen narrow steps which were at right angles to it, seemed to intimate that it led to some flanking tower or building which pro-The door was unlocked, and jected beyond the main edifice.

Clifford introduced into the apartment within.

It was a room of moderate size—it might be twenty feet square, and seemed in a better state of preservation than the other portions of the castle. Still, however, its appearance was wretched enough. The walls had originally been painted in rude fresco, but little remained of the magnificence, for the greater part of the plaster had fallen to the ground. The windows, too, were open. In the south of Europe glass has always been rare, and in early times its use was confined solely to the interiors of palaces. Sashes, therefore, there were none, but unhappily, the large wooden shutters which had once supplied their place had also fallen out, and nothing opposed the entrance of the night air, which now swept round the chamber with its usual low moaning sound, melancholy at all times, but doubly so in the ears of one predisposed to painful contemplations. Wretched as the place was, it had seemingly been prepared for the reception of its new occupant, and an attempt made to give it a cheerful character. In the large chimney, for fortunately for Clifford the room bore that impress of its Gothic character, a fire was blazing; near it a pallet bed had been prepared, while the addition of a rude stool and table completed the catalogue of its furniture.

In this apartment Clifford's conductors paused. Without uttering a word they removed the mule-girth which had fastened his arms to his side, and leaving the room, locked the door behind them.

During the early part of his captivity the prisoner had alternately indulged in violent outbursts of passion, or sought by questions to learn the object of his captors, but his anger and interrogations were alike received in sullen silence. It was in vain that, assuming that plunder was the object of the gipsies, he had not only offered them all the money about his person, but had promised them a hundred crowns, a sum sufficient to tempt the rapacity of half the Gitanos in Spain, in the event of his being immediately and safely carried to Madrid. It was in vain, too, when the bribe failed of success that he had endeavoured to alarm his captors by threats of vengeance to be exacted by some potent friends for the outrage against his person; nor promises, nor threats, nor questions awoke reply, till at length the young envoy, hopeless of producing any effect, imitated the taciturnity of his guides, and submitted passively to their wishes without expressing dissent or making opposition.

'Well,' said he to himself, after he had been left alone and looked ruefully round the apartment, 'I doubt if I have any reason to congratulate myself upon my talent for diplomacy. First,' continued he, counting on his fingers, 'I hire a muleteer who turns out one of a gang of as great scoundrels as any in Spain; secondly, I must needs make acquaintance with a girl of whom I knew nothing but that she had a pretty face and a pair of bright eyes; thirdly, I play the Don Quixote, and instead of minding my own business, must scour the road for the purpose of succouring distressed damsels; (it would have served me right if I had got my head cracked for my pains;) and fourthly, after finding out that my rogue of a guide was a Gitano, I must needs keep him in my service, and so prepare the way more easily for his leading me into this pitfall. What will Lord Stanhope say when he hears of my folly? And what do the scoundrels mean to do with me? They can be no vulgar cutpurses. or they would have taken my money long ago. To suppose them political agents is absurd, for they and the authorities are the worst of enemies. So what to make of the matter I know not: but paciencia, as the Castilians say, unless they cut my throat to-night or starve me to-morrow the thing must sooner or later explain itself. But I may as well see what my quarters are like. It is possible that I may find a means of escape.

With the thought he proceeded to examine his chamber. survey was not difficult to make. Its bare walls had nothing in the shape of furniture to relieve the gaunt surface. On one side was the large fireplace—decidedly, as it was now filled, the most attractive portion of the apartment. Opposite was the open window before described. Upon investigation it promised nothing. It seemed full fifty feet from the ground, and faced the north, as in the clear starlit sky the belt of Orion and the Great Bear were both distinctly The door by which he had entered was too well fastened to suggest hope, but there was one of smaller size on the other side of the room, which he had not as yet visited, and to this he now applied himself. The portal was closed simply by a bolt opening from the sitting-room, and upon this being drawn yielded at once to his touch. He passed through, and found himself on the top of a large square tower. The roof seemed arched, and the embrasures all round it were still perfect. It apparently stood at the south-west angle of the building. From its summit the view was unbroken, and from the clearness of the southern sky, and the brightness of the starry night, the general outlines of the surrounding landscape were seen distinctly enough.

While approaching his prison through the forest, the density of the wood had confined Clifford's view to such an extent as to make him altogether unable to guess at his whereabouts. Now, from the top of the tower he was better able to understand the position of his dungeon. The old building occupied the point of one of the southern spurs of the Somo Sierra. To the west and north, the mountain range loomed forth against the sky, the dark masses of its forest being here and there relieved by a rocky point or perpendicular cliff. To the south and south-east, the ground fell rapidly, while lights at intervals marked the sites of the little towns that were scattered around the base of the range. One of these, and to judge from the number of its fires, of considerable extent, was apparently not more than half a league off.

'That must be San Agustin,' said Clifford to himself, 'my intended night's quarters, but homme propose—Dieu dispose, and instead, I am the tenant of a garret in an old Moorish castle in the mountains. Well, bad as it is, if the rascals would let me go tomorrow, I am as well off as in most of the ventas of Spain, and with all its faults the place is a deal better than the top of this con-

founded out-look, so I'll back to my quarters.'

Accordingly, he returned to his bed-room, fastening the door as he passed. He had scarcely done so when his six guards entered the apartment. As before, they were perfectly silent, but their conduct was eloquent enough, for they proceeded without delay to despoil the person of their captive of everything of value he possessed. The large ring which confined his handkerchief at the throat, his gold and silver, his pocket-book, everything was abstracted, and carefully examined in a business-like manner, which seemed to intimate a complete acquaintance with the mysteries of their craft. Still, when the investigation had been concluded, they seemed dissatisfied; yet it could not have been from want of sufficient remuneration. The bag of dollars was large and paunchy, as purses should be; its fellow with the gold, though smaller, was equally well replenished. Nevertheless the crowns were chucked aside, the purse, containing twenty ounces of gold, neglected, and again and again they turned over the leaves of his pocket-book, as if in search of something more precious than had as yet fallen into their fingers. At length they seemed fairly at fault, and one of them, after whispering to his companions, left the room.

Clifford had submitted to the plunder of his property without any attempt at resistance; nay more, had seen with indifference rings, and silver, and gold appropriated by the Gitanos; but when they threw down the money and re-commenced a second time the examination of his ample pocket-book, peering into its envelopes, and even separating with their knives the outer from the inner leather, he changed colour, and began to show symptoms of anxiety.

'They cannot surely suspect,' said he to himself, in a tone of doubt, 'the existence of the state papers or the place of their concealment.'

Absurd as the idea appeared to him, his fears were too well founded, for the Gitano who had left the room returned and whispered something to his companions. In obedience apparently to his secret order, they removed Clifford's coat, waistcoat, and shirt. Beneath the last was a thin short under-dress of silk, which fitted close to the skin, and by its unbroken surface presented no facility for concealment. The Gitano, however, seemed to act from information, for this dress also they removed, and, from a pocket artistically placed under the left arm, they took out a small packet done up in leather.

Hitherto, the envoy had borne the investigation with patience and in silence, but with the discovery of the packet, his self-control seemed to have abandoned him; for, springing suddenly upon the man who had become the possessor of the precious document, with one hand he hurled him to the ground, while with the other he wrenched the missive from his grasp, and threw it into the fire. Alas! the effort was unavailing: three of the Gitanos flung themselves upon Clifford and pinioned his arms to his side, while a fourth rushed to the chimney, and plunging his hand amid the half-burned logs, extracted the mysterious packet uninjured, except in the slight singeing of its outer coating.

As soon as it had been recovered, he who had acted as leader of the party carried it from the room, as if to guard it against the risk of future injury. The rest, without exhibiting either anger or astonishment at the violence of their prisoner, replaced his dress, and once more quitted the apartment, locking, as before, the door behind

them.

It is difficult to exaggerate the expression of despair which marked the features of the unhappy captive. His usually bold, fearless, insouciant expression had disappeared, and he sat down on the bed, his head sunk upon his breast, his back bent as if with age, and arms and legs alike offering in their languid attitude the appearance of

extreme debility.

'It wanted but this,' muttered he to himself in a low tone. wanted but this to fill my cup of evil fortune to the brim. A worthy close to a worthy commencement. I begin my career of envoy by thinking of a pretty girl's eyes, and I end it by being, like the rest of my sex, her fool, her dupe, her plaything; for she is, there can be no doubt of it, a spy of Alberoni, and has been employed to inveigle me on the road, and possess herself of my papers without compromising the Cardinal. And now she has got them sure enough, all and every one,' continued he, as he once more commenced reckoning his calamities on his fingers. 'First, my commission from Lord Stanhope: secondly, my letter of credence to the Queen, with that to the Marquis Scotti; thirdly, Dubois' letter to D'Aubenton, the father confessor, promising him a cardinal's hat; and lastly Lord Stanhone's bills on England for fifty thousand crowns. My money, my interest, my introductions, every lever, in short, by which I was to overthrow the power of this priestly Colossus, lost, irretrievably lost.' And the unhappy diplomatist wrung his hands in the bitter-

ness of his spirit, and groaned aloud.

In the mean time the night advanced. The wind, which had fallen towards sundown, had now died away, and in the still air every sound was distinctly audible. It was about two hours since Clifford had been despoiled of his precious documents, but he still sat on his bed, his head sunk, his limbs motionless, his eyes fixed, and unconscious of surrounding objects. The room was nearly dark, for the fire had burned low, and the chamber was unprovided with any light but its flame, as the Gitanos, who had brought with them a lamp to assist in their deed of spoliation, had removed it on their departure. All at once the silence of the forest was broken by the tinkle of a mule's bells. The sound approached nearer and nearer, till at length, as far as Clifford was able to judge, it seemed to stop in the neighbourhood of the south-western portion of the building.

'Some fresh victims, no doubt,' said he. 'Some new traveller, who, like myself, has been inveigled into this den of thieves; but from the top of the flanking tower I may chance to have a view of

them. I'll to the roof.'

He arose as he spoke, and gently unbarred the door which had before admitted him to the summit of the adjacent building. With noiseless step he approached the bartizan and gazed anxiously below. The scene was one well calculated to rivet his attention. In the background was a mule, but with the saddle unoccupied. In front, and near him, stood a lady, apparently, from her dress, a traveller and the proprietress of the unmounted animal. It was clear, however, that she was no captive. There were, indeed, some twenty or thirty Gitanos round her, but they all held themselves in an attitude of profound respect, their heads reverentially bent, and their broad-brimmed sombreros in their hands. In the centre of the group, and immediately in front of the lady, was another of the tribe. He seemed to express his devotion even in a more passionate manner than the rest, for he was upon his knees, and presented his fair companion with a packet. The whole scene was lighted up by numerous torches, and amid the darkness of the forest their bright Rembrandt-like light brought into full relief the principal figures of the picture. It was impossible to mistake them. The kneeling figure was that scoundrel Perez; the gift which he presented was the lost, the invaluable packet; and the lady—for at that moment she chanced to raise her head, and the light streamed clear upon her countenance—was that most faithless of womankind, for whom he had risked life and limb, the lady with the many names, the Donna Teresa of his affections, the Mademoiselle de Chalais of Irun, the Senorita of the road.

Horror-struck at so much treachery and ingratitude, Clifford could not refrain a faint cry. It seemed to act like the exorcism of some holy priest upon evil spirits called into existence by the wand of a magician; for no sooner was it uttered than the torches were extinguished and the parties disappeared behind an angle of the

building. Eagerly did the captive peer into the surrounding darkness, but in vain. The lights, the lady, the mule, the gipsies, had all vanished. Once more the forest had resumed its silence and its gloom, and the only shape to which his keen eyes could give individuality below, was that of a gaunt stunted tree that pressed itself forward on the narrow strip of open ground which encircled his prison walls.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A BROTHER ENVOY.

For some time after the inexplicable vision had disappeared, Clifford kept his post on the roof of the tower. Nothing new, however, occurred to awaken curiosity or excite remark, and the chill air drove him once more back to the shelter of his apartment. It was now completely dark, for the fire had burned out, and the embers on the hearth, though still red, no longer afforded even the doubtful

light which their flames formerly offered.

The solitude, however, was not long-lived; steps were again heard upon the stair, the door was unlocked, and his gaolers reentered the room. Unwelcome as their appearance might have been supposed, at the present moment they proved to be no disagreeable visitors. Four of them bore an ample supply of firewood, a fifth brought up a stone pipkin of red earth, called an olla, containing the usual national dish of hotch-potch, but composed of materials selected with greater attention to delicacy than those which generally form the contents of the supper tureen at a Spanish inn; while the sixth carried a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, a knife, fork, salt and pepper, together with a plate, and even a table napkin. The supper was placed upon the table, the firewood heaped upon the hearth, and a coarse lamp suspended upon a nail on one of the side walls. This done, the attendants retired. Clifford would have detained them to ask questions, but they affected not to hear him, and left the room without replying. One, and one only, he who acted as chief of the party, paused for a moment ere he locked the door, and said, 'Buenas noches, senor;' as if in intimation that the prisoner was not again to be disturbed for the night.

The day had been a trying one for the envoy of Lord Stanhope. He had been robbed and manacled, and had not only lost all the documents likely to make his mission effective, but had suffered the misfortune at the hands of one whom he had preserved from ruin and dishonour. At a later period of life such an accumulation of calamities would have probably deprived him of all inclination for food; but he was still young, and youth, whatever be its misfortunes, seldom lacks appetite. Had it really vanished, the goodly odour which began to diffuse itself over the apartment would have speedily reawakened it. For one moment, and no more, did the captive gaze sadly after his retreating attendants, in the next he

had snuffed the haut gout of the dish beside him, and pulling his

stool eagerly to the table, commenced the attack.

The puchero was well worthy his particular attention. There was a pair of pullets so fresh and fat that four-and-twenty hours could not have elapsed since they had left their well-fed quarters in some neighbouring farmer's poultry-yard. There was a lump of bacon—in Spain that pleasant test of Christianity—with fat and lean so beautifully mixed, the lean of so deep a carnation, the fat of so delicate a pink, that it would have tempted a Jew to abandon his creed. Then there was a groundwork of beef and jolly sausages, with a single black-pudding to vary their flavour, and broad beans, and onions, and peas, and tomatoes, and red pepper, all mixed together in a manner that gave assurance of the skill of the artist.

'By Jove,' said Clifford, as mouthful after mouthful vanished down his throat, 'this is a puchero, and something like a puchero. I doubt if Gil Blas's chef, Joachim, the fellow who used to tickle the palate of the archbishop of Valencia, could have produced anything so good. And now for the liquor,' continued he, as he laid hold of the large leathern bottle, holding somewhat more than a quart, and extracted its wooden cork. 'Let us see whether Father Bacchus has been as propitious to us as Ceres, and that other most respectable divinity (I fear her name has never been chronicled) who presides over ready-dressed dinners. As he spoke he put the bottle to his mouth and took a long and deep draught. 'Valdepenas,' said he, replacing the flask upon the table. 'Valdepenas, as I am a living man. Where can these children of the devil have picked it up? Or how am I to explain their conduct? They rob me, and they feed me like a prince; ay, and with suitable attendance too: a maître de hotel, a butler, and four footmen. Lord Clifford himself could not but be satisfied with the respect paid to his son. But it is no use puzzling myself about the rascals and their future intentions. "Business to-morrow," said some, no doubt, wise man in Greek history, "and business to-morrow," would say my two chiefs, Lord Stanhope and his blackguard little friend, the Cardinal Dubois, were they in my place; so "business to-morrow," say I.'

With the words Clifford addressed himself to the good things before him. Ere he quitted the table the plump capons and the Valdepenas were things that had been. He then heaped fresh billets upon the fire from the fuel which had been profusely left by his attendants, and flinging himself upon his couch, was soon fast

asieep

The sun was shining bright on the following morning when he awoke, and after the keen breezes of the mountain, the warmer air of the south struck genially on the senses. The hour was late, and the first glance satisfied him that others were earlier risers than himself, for the fire once more burned brightly in the chimney, while the remains of the supper of the preceding night had been removed, and its place supplied by a cold roast partridge, some bread and a fresh bottle of wine. Their appearance was tempting

enough, and Clifford, rejoicing in the appetite of three-and-twenty, played the part of a trencherman with as brilliant success as if he

had been upon lenten fare for a fortnight.

'No doubt of it,' said he, as he lounged against the fire-place, and, lighting a cigar, abandoned himself to its enjoyment. 'The ancients were right. There is a difference in the temper of Philip full and Philip fasting. I feel myself in the most merciful of humours after such a supper and such a breakfast, and could almost forgive my worst enemy.'

The words had been spoken aloud, and it seemed as if they had been listened to, for the door was opened gently, and Perez stood before him. His appearance, however, was too much for Clifford's recently-announced charitable resolution, for his face flushed crimson with anger, and springing forward, he seized him by the collar. 'Now,' said he, 'my good fellow, you and I have an account to settle. What reason can you give me why I should not fling you out of the window?'

The Gitano offered no resistance, and appeared to feel no embarrassment. On the contrary, with a quiet smile, and in a calm tone, which marked confidence, he said, 'Two most excellent reasons, senor. The first is, I have but to whistle, and ere you could drag me half across the room your six attendants might think fit to dispute your worship's method of treating a comrade; the second, because I have never done you injury.'

'No injury, you scoundrel,' said the young soldier, in a towering passion; 'do you call it none to have seized me on the highway, to have bound me to my mule, to have brought me here as a prisoner,

and to have robbed me of my property?

'You might have added,' said Perez, with a half smile, 'and given you a supper and breakfast fit for the Dean of St. Jago. But I repeat, I have done you no injury whatever. Do you remember our contract at Irun?' 'Perfectly; you were to convey me safe and sound to Madrid.'

'Precisely; and it is the part of a trusty arriero to keep his word.'

'Caramba! do you call this fulfilling it?' 'I do at least my best towards it, and your worship can ask no more.'

'You propose, therefore, Senor Perez,' said Clifford, in a mocking tone, 'still to conduct me to the end of my journey!' 'I do. It

is for that purpose I came hither.'

'And my property? If you stand upon your duty as an arriero, you are bound also to guarantee that.' 'Of your property hereafter; I have at present but to address myself to the safety of your worship's person.'

'I have first, most illogical sir, to learn that it is threatened by

any but yourself.'

It is; but by a simple process I will secure it. I am about to change you so that your worst enemies would not recognize you. I know the secret of a wash which will give you the colour of one of

my tribe, and to-night, as a Gitano, and in their dress, will you enter the capital.'

'What! stain myself till I am as black as a Moor, and clothe myself in your rags!' said the impatient envoy. 'Never! I tell you,

never!' and he paced the apartment with indignation.

'And why not?' replied Perez, with a half smile. 'As far as rags go, your worship's velvet jacket, since we came through the scrub, is nearly as tattered, with all respect be it spoken, as the clothing of my friends below; and as to the face-staining, that has been adopted, when occasion needed, by caballeros of as high lineage as a——,' and he paused for a moment while he looked at Clifford with an intelli-

gent glarice, and then added, 'a contrabandista.'

It was impossible, however, to reconcile his companion to the proposal. He was very handsome, and naturally not unconscious of it, and like the great actor who refused to play Othello because he would be compelled to black his face, he could not make up his mind to smear over the eloquent blood of the fair forehead, which sundry titled dowagers, in his boyhood, had touched with an admiring lip, as they kissed him for his mother's sake. To say the truth, had the fair lady of Irun not been in the way, the struggle would have been less determined; but she seemed to possess the principle of ubiquity; and to be seen by her, looking like one of what in after years Charles Lamb called 'innocent blacknesses,' was too much for his philosophy. Again he stoutly refused to accede to the proposition. The resolution, notwithstanding the energetic tone in which it was worded and delivered, seemed in no degree to discompose Perez; and in his usual quiet tone he repeated, 'Your worship will 'Never, I tell you.'

Perez nodded and smiled. Clifford lost his temper.

'What do you mean, you rascal, by nodding and smiling? I have suffered evil enough at your hands, and am not going to finish my career by having myself painted like the devil at a Funcion, when the monks get up a puppetshow and bring the horned fiend upon the stage to terrify the ladies.'

Again Perez repeated his pantomimic expressions of dissent.

'Oh! now I understand you,' said the infuriated soldier; 'you intend to bring your six ratones to your aid, and do the disguising against my will. Well, I deny not they have the power, and I must submit to force;' and he folded his arms and drew himself up in an attitude intended to convey the idea of a dignified submission to unavoidable misfortune.

Once more Perez smiled. 'No, your worship,' said he, 'I meant that the staining and the dressing would be done willingly and with

your own consent.'

'Never! I repeat a thousand times, never! You have the greater force on your side, and can vanquish the efforts of a weak body, but you have no power over the mind,' and again he assumed the air of a magnanimous submission to an evil destiny.

The attitude, imposing as it was intended to be, produced no

effect upon the Gitano. He smiled quietly as before, and continued, in his usual calm tone, 'Your worship is resolved; but what are resolutions against the powers of magic? Our tribe possess spells.'

'Use them.'

'We have the hokkano baro.' 'I defy it.'

'In one minute it will produce obedience.' 'Again I laugh

'Nay, then, the strength of my art must show itself.'

With these words Perez crossed his arms so as to place his two hands within the bosom of his vest; he then withdrew them, clasped them together, and placed them upon the table.

'I am about,' said he, 'to show you the order of my master-spirit;

but you must promise me not to touch it.'

'Willingly,' replied Clifford, in a contemptuous tone; 'I have no wish to become the possessor of your fooleries.'

'Be it a bargain, then; and now read your destiny.'

He withdrew his hands as he spoke, and displayed beneath it a small slip of paper. Clifford approached it, and to his unutterable astonishment, read, in the well-known handwriting of the British ambassador, the following words:—

'To C. C.—Obey the orders of the bearer.—Stanhope.'

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CITY GATE.

GREAT, however, as was his surprise, he did not hesitate for a moment how to act. The habits of his military life had accustomed him to discipline, and he was aware that it was not less necessary in his new career than in his old. As to the authenticity of the document, he could not doubt it: he was too well acquainted with the handwriting of Lord Stanhope. With regard to the means by which it had found its way into the possession of the Gitano he asked no questions. He had been warned before he left Paris that, engaged as he was in a secret mission, it might be necessary to communicate with him by agents very different from those generally employed in diplomacy, and who themselves would be ignorant alike of his real character, or the effect of the orders they conveyed. Clifford at once arrived at the conclusion that the gipsy was one of these agents, and resolved to obey.

'Your magicians are more powerful than I dreamt of,' said he, laughingly, to the gipsy, 'and I own myself unable to resist their spell. When go we to Madrid?' 'At mid-day, if it be that the dye be dry by that time; for it is not every day that we can get

within the walls, and we have an opportunity to-night.'

'Come, then,' said Clifford, 'try your hand at once at the paintbrush. You are no doubt a Spanish artist, but I scarce think that you will prove a Velasquez or a Murillo.'

'I have heard tell, senor, of these caballeros,' said Perez, in reply,

'and that they were great men in their art; but they had to deal with inanimate canvas, and I measure not myself with them—but,

for painting a living man, I yield to no artist in Spain.'

As he spoke, he left the chamber, and returned shortly after, bearing a stone pitcher of water and a pipkin of the same material. Into the latter he emptied some powders which he mixed up carefully, and proceeded to dye with it the face, the neck, and hands of the young soldier. With a liquid of a more glutinous character he painted the eyebrow, and moustache, and whiskers, and the lower portion of the hair.

'It is but rough work, your worship, but the job requires no great care, for you will be seen only by lamp-light, so sit down for an hour, and in that time the dye will have taken enough consistency.

In the meanwhile I will go prepare your dress.'

He shortly after returned, bearing with him the garments in question. They were not very attractive, and their future wearer glanced at them with an eye which indicated something of repugnance. His

guide interpreted the look correctly.

'Your worship need not be alarmed,' said he, with a smile; 'the dress was my own, and, though old, it is clean, for it has been purposely washed for the senor's use. As to the rags, the more tatters the better. It would be but bad policy to flash a new suit before the eyes of those greedy leeches, the soldiers, at the Puerta de Funcaral.'

As soon as the dye which had been applied to his skin was dried, Clifford proceeded to invest himself in his disguise. The suit in its main features corresponded to that which he laid aside, for the dress of the people of the Peninsula varies little in its general character throughout the rural districts of Spain. It consisted of a zamarra, or jacket of untanned sheep skin, with the wool turned outwards; a waistcoat of what apparently had been once a gaudy pattern, but which, stained and worn, possessed little of its primitive colour; a pair of large and full breeches of coarse brown cloth, buttoning at the knee, and patched there and elsewhere with pieces of stuff of a colour in no degree corresponding to that of the original garment, coarse-ribbed brown stockings, and high shoes much the worse for wear. The dress was put on; the Gitano assisting in the toilet: and, 'Now,' said he, as he looked approvingly at his handiwork, 'your worship is complete, except your sash, your knife, and your This faja was of crimson silk once, and will encircle your worship's waist gallantly; and there is the navaja,' said he, passing as he spoke a large long sheathed knife of a most suspicious appearance within the silken girdle. 'And now for the sombrero; your worship by rights should wear a Montero cap, and with its high peak, and your own height together, you would have looked a gallant caballero; but, to say the truth, you are too tall for a Gitano already, and the narrow brim of the montero would show too much of your face, so I thought it best to give you one of my muleteer hats. It is very broad in the brim, and, as the beaver has been a

good deal knocked about, it laps well over the eyes, which is convenient: and now, your worship, we have a gallop of nine leagues before us, and the sooner we are off the better.'

Clifford professed his readiness to start, and asked no questions either with regard to what had become of his property or their future route, or even as to the fair dame whose appearances were so mysterious, and who had taken such interest in his fortunes. 'I suspect,' said he to himself, 'that Lord Stanhope has more agents in Spain than I was aware of, and I must for the present trust to their

guidance.'

Thus abandoning himself passively to events he left the room, and followed his guide down stairs to the court-yard. The inhabitants, who had tenanted it so densely, had disappeared, and nothing spoke of their presence but the marks of their fires, and some rags and well-gnawed bones which were scattered up and down under the arcades. From a deserted room which opened from it, Perez led forth the two mules. They had been well cared for; and were in high condition. To the pummel of Clifford's saddle was attached a rough blanket coat with loose sleeves, but there were no fire-arms. The double-barrelled rifle and the pistol had, to all appearance, followed the envoy's credentials.

'And now to the saddle, your worship,' said the gipsy. 'We have a rough ride before us, and it is better to do it in the daylight than

in the dark.'

So saying he mounted, and Clifford followed his example. The gipsy struck off at a rapid pace. For an hour he took his way through a broken country, seemingly the spurs of the sierra, for the travellers ascended and descended repeatedly low hills, bounded upon either side by mountain torrents, which poured their waters from the range into the plain below. At length they seemed to approach the low country, for a high ridge, at the summit of which they had arrived, gave them an unbroken view of everything to the south and to the east, and here the Gitano drew rein.

'You may light a cigarito, senor,' said he. 'We will here give the poor beasts five minutes' breathing-time. It has been a hard hour's work; but I was obliged to avoid the main road, as there are hawks abroad. There,' said he, as he extended his hand to the left, 'is San Agustin, where your worship intended to sleep last night; and yonder,' continued he, turning to the south, and pointing to some spires of churches which were visible in the distance through the clear horizon, 'is Madrid, six good leagues off. But it is all flat country now, and the mules will do the work easily enough.'

The Gitano once more resumed his journey, followed by his companion: half-an-hour's riding brought them to the foot of the range. With it the forest disappeared, and before them extended a long, flat, sandy plain, unbroken by fence or timber, and across this the travellers moved at a rapid pace. The rains however of the preceding day had made the ground heavy, and the sun had long set ere they reached a ruined house about half a league from the capital.

It appeared to be occupied, for the light of a fire showed itself through the broken windows. Perez, however, seemed suspicious, for he pulled up his mule a few yards off, and uttered a low cry. It was the same note of the owl which had startled Clifford on the night of his conference with Donna Teresa, at Buitrago. It was immediately responded to in a similar tone.

'All's well,' said the guide, and followed by Clifford, he rode his

mule right into the house.

The apartment within was tenanted by four men in the gipsy garb, whom Clifford recognised at once as a portion of those who had attended him in the Moorish tower. They welcomed their prisoner with a grim smile, and then turning to his guide, answered some questions which he eagerly put to them. The interrogations and the reply were in the Rommany dialect, and of course unintelligible, but one phrase occurred often. It was 'La Tuerta,' and seemed the name of some person who was to act an important part in the night's drama. The information, whatever it was, appeared

satisfactory, for Perez laughed gaily and rubbed his hands.

'You must remain here for two hours, senor,' said he. 'We are to be at the Puerta de Funcaral by eight o'clock. In the mean-while I have provided for your worship's entertainment:' and he produced from his wallet a roast partridge, the brother probably of that which had furnished the breakfast table in the old tower, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of Valdepenas. These he placed beside Clifford, while he and his comrades contented themselves by making their supper on bread of Indian corn and onions, washed down by some country-wine of an inferior quality. The repast over, the party betook themselves to their cigaritos, and for upwards of an hour sat smoking in silence. At length, as seven o'clock approached, Perez rose.

'It is time for your worship to be going,' said he, 'for we have half-a-league to do on foot, and the ground is miry; so tie your mantle over your left shoulder, there just so, it should hang exactly like a hussar's over-jacket; and now remember, whatever you see or hear, say nothing; and recollect, keep your head low, and let as little of the light get under the brim of your hat as may be. And now, brothers,' continued he, turning to his companions, 'to work.'

He left the house, followed by Clifford and three of the Gitanos. The fourth remained behind, probably to take care of the mules. Perez moved at a rapid pace, and, notwithstanding the darkness of the night, with an unhesitating step which marked his intimate acquaintance with the localities. After about half-an-hour's walking, the party approached the city, for occasional voices were heard, and here and there lights seen from the windows. About two hundred yards from the wall was a small enclosure of stone, probably intended for a cattle-pen, and again as he approached it Perez uttered his low owl-like cry. It was replied to as before, but this time the voice of the speaker had a shrillness in the tone which seemed to denote that it came from the other sex. And so it

proved, for some half-dozen gipsy women issued from the building. A few sentences in Rommany were interchanged between them and the guide. They had, in all probability, reference to Clifford, for the swarthy dames crowded round him, and their piercing black eyes seemed to flash even in the night, as each in turn peered under the brim of his sombrero. The examination seemed satisfactory, especially to the youngest of the fair spies, who, after having curiously raised the hat to assist her in her investigation, exclaimed, 'Es hermoso, me gusta mucho!' The naïveté of the girl's admiration awoke the laughter of her companions, but it was instantly repressed, for at that moment the great clock of the church of the Atocha convent began to peal forth the hour of eight. As the first stroke of its hammer came upon the ear, Perez started, exclaiming, 'Have done with folly, muchachas, we are late!'

He left the ruin as he spoke, and, followed by the whole party, hurried to the gate. The last sounds of the noble bell were still pealing as he reached it, and he instantly made his presence known

by rapping at it and demanding admission.

'Vaya! Here's an ado,' said a soldier, as he looked over the top of the low wall, 'who is it who would enter the city to-night? Ratones no doubt—pick-purses from the highway, who want to sell their booty. Go to the devil with your impudence, I will not undraw a bolt.' 'Fair sir, beautiful sir!' said a female voice from Clifford's elbow, 'you will not be so cruel as to keep honest folks from their houses in such weather; and you of all men, Senor Lopez, with those charming eyes of yours that would win the love of a princess. You to be so hard-hearted.'

'They are Gitanos!' shouted the infuriated janitor; 'better and better, and with all the edicts of our Lord the King out against them to have the audacity to present themselves at the Puerta de Funcaral. And the girl knows my name too. They are sorceresses. Caramba!—They are sorceresses, and have dealings with the Evil One,' and the soldier crossed himself devoutly as if to protect him-

self from the danger of their presence.

The gipsies, however, were not to be so easily repulsed. The woman, who had apparently been selected as the orator of the party, returned to the charge, and lavished upon the janitor above, with whose person she was clearly acquainted, a thousand caressing speeches, painting his features in turn from eye to chin, in language eulogistic enough to have described an Antinous, and hinting at his success with the fair sex in inuendoes, which, to judge from the exclamations of astonishment or horror which occasionally burst from the soldier, were too accurate to have been the result of chance. At length the clamour seemed to arouse the attention of others of the guardians of the gate, for a voice as of the officer in command was heard asking the cause of dispute.

'Tis some Gitanos, Don Antonio,' said the first speaker in reply.

'Some heathen hounds, who want to enter the city.'

' Keep them outside, Lopez,' said the officer. 'Weather like this

will serve to cool their cantrips. But now I think of it,' he added, as if some recollection suddenly struck him, 'I will hold conference with the scoundrels. Halloo! below there!'

'What would your worship?' replied Perez, in a tone of the most

cringing subserviency.

'You are Gitanos.' 'Your worship is right. We are of the Errate.'

'It is well. Now will I let you inside if you can answer my question. They tell me that there is a young caballero, a contrabandista, who is travelling from Irun to Madrid, in company with one of your accursed race. He was last seen on the Somo Sierra. Can you tell me anything of him?'

Perez nudged Clifford with his elbow ere he replied. He then

answered-

'Alas! senor, I know nothing of him, or of any other traveller. I am a poor artisan who live in the city. It was but yesterday I saw your worship ride up the Calle Alcalá on your mottled gray.

The Cid could not have looked a more gallant caballero.'

'None of your compliments, you scoundrel,' cried the worthy captain of the gate, not, however, the less gratified by the flattery. 'If I am not the Cid, I am as noble a gentleman, and may be more so. But come, I will help your memory. I have a wish to see that said contrabandista, and you shall have ten crowns if you can help me to lay hand upon him, for orders have come from his Eminence the Cardinal for his arrest.'

Again Perez nudged Clifford, but ere the Gitano was able to repeat his assurances of his ignorance of the party for whose apprehension so much anxiety was expressed, the commandant was sum-

moned to the interior, and thither we must follow him.

In a small room attached to the gate-house, and appropriated to the officer of the guard, was a woman of about sixty. She was slightly bent with age, but the glance of her eye, and the occasional movement of her limbs, still showed abundance of latent energy. She wore the dress usual with the gipsy tribes, the short voluminous bright-coloured petticoat, the dark vandyked boddice, the crimson handkerchief tied over the head; while the neck, notwithstanding her age, was still bare and encircled with a gay-coloured scarf. In her hand was a basket full of ribands, the talisman which opened the doors of half the houses in Madrid to this emissary of the god of love. In one respect at least she was no unfit representative of the blind deity, for she had herself, as her name, 'La Tuerta,' signified, but a single eye, which, bright, piercing, restless, and now fierce and now fawning, was no bad index of the character of its possessor. She stood in the corner of the room, motionless as a statue, and intimated her consciousness of Don Antonio's approach only by a slight and grave nod of the head.

The worthy commandant was more flurried. Hastily shutting the door, he hurried towards the gipsy, and in a voice which

abundantly showed his agitation, he said-

'What news, Pepa? Do you bring me happiness at last? Will Donna Clara see me? Have I any hope of melting her flinty heart?'

Pepa smiled slightly.

'My people,' said she, 'are interested. If I bring joy to the cavalier, what is to be my reward?' 'All I can give,' said Don Antonio, eagerly. 'If it be a message'—

'A couple of crowns you would say. But if it be a letter?'—and

the gipsy looked interrogatively.

The young officer's eyes flashed with pleasure. 'You do not say so? You cannot mean it?' said he. The gipsy nodded.

'This ring,' continued the soldier, as he drew one from his finger,

"would be but a poor guerdon for such a gift."

'Well,' returned his fair companion, 'it will suffice. Yet, ere I give you the letter, let me ask how it was, if you are so anxious to hear from your lady love, you kept the messenger so long waiting? Our appointment was for eight.' 'True, true, true,' said the conscious lover, with something of a blush; 'but I was kept at the gate. Some Gitanos wished to enter.'

'And you have given them permission?' 'It is impossible; the laws are severe. I might have done so,' muttered he to himself, 'on certain conditions; but then the Cardinal would have

borne me out.'

'You a lover!' said the gipsy, contemptuously; 'I will tell Donna Clara that you do not deserve the name. And this letter,' and she half drew one from the bosom of her boddice, 'shall be returned to

her who sent it.'

The exclamations of the unfortunate soldier at the cruelty of the gipsy were, as may be supposed, loud enough; but they were unavailing. The messenger refused to part with her precious missive except on her own terms. But it is easy to guess the result. Don Antonio was but five-and-twenty, and at five-and-twenty love carries the day. To gain the longed-for letter, bolts were drawn and bars fell, and Clifford and his party were permitted to enter, unremarked by any but honest Lopez, who crossed himself devoutly as they passed, muttering, as he fixed his eyes upon the female travellers, 'Sorceresses—very sorceresses, or how could they have known that I was walking in the Buen Retiro last fête-day with Francesca, the grocer's daughter?'

In the mean time the travellers moved rapidly up the Calle de Funcaral. As they passed along, the gipsies gradually fell off on

either side, till at length Clifford was left alone with Perez.

The young soldier had asked no questions as to his destination. Prior to his capture and robbery, his own plans had been distinct enough. Before leaving Paris, the British ambassador, through the medium of a resident in Madrid, who had been a spy of the English government during the war, and who still continued to act as their agent, had taken for his representative, apartments in the house of a person whose discretion could be depended on. They were in a retired street, at no great distance from the Puerta del Sol, a central

situation, which would enable the embryo diplomatist to communicate easily with the palace, or with any of the nobility with whom he might find it to be politic to connect himself. The street was called the Calle de la Cabeza. To this sundry boxes had been sent, filled with dresses of different ranks so as to afford disguises to the future lodger, should he find it necessary to assume them. To guard against accidents, no note had been made in writing of the address; but Clifford had carefully got by heart the name of the proprietor of the house, its number in the street, and the floor which it occupied in the tenement itself: a matter the more easy as from his long residence in Madrid he was intimately acquainted not only with its leading thoroughfares, but its more minute by-lanes.

Of the quarters selected for him he had of course said nothing to his guide. He was a good deal surprised, therefore, to find the Gitano, on leaving the Calle de Funcaral, move in a direct line towards his intended residence. As Perez advanced, his destination became less and less doubtful. He passed with a rapid step through the Puerta del Sol, keeping at a distance from the few lamps that lighted it, moved up the Calle de las Carretas, crossed the street of Atocha, and turning short to the left, entered that of the Cabeza. Still going onwards, he stopped at the entrance of a small gloomylooking house on the right-hand, and rang a bell. The portal was opened by a latch raised by a cord connected with some story above. Up the steps unhesitatingly went the gipsy, still followed by his companion, till they reached the second floor. There an open door awaited them, at which with a candle in his hand, stood an elderly man of grave aspect. He touched his chin and rubbed his right ear. Clifford answered the secret signal by a corresponding gesture, and in another minute he was ushered into a room where a lamp was burning, and in the centre of which was a brazier heaped with charcoal. At the further end of the apartment were some boxes which he recognized as having last seen in Paris; but on a table near them was an object which at once made every other a matter of indifference, and towards which he sprung with a halfuttered cry; for there lay the repository of the treasures of his mission—the packet of packets, which had been so mysteriously taken from him in the Moorish tower. Eagerly did he turn to learn from his guide the cause of its loss and its restoration, but once more his curiosity was destined to be baffled. Perez had disappeared.

## CHAPTER XIX.

#### THE CARDINAL.

WE must transfer the scene to another part of Madrid.

The royal residence, at the period of our story, was a different building from that which is now the abode of the sovereigns of Spain. The palace which had witnessed the councils and the magnificence of Charles V and his successors of the house of Austria; and which was still the dwelling-place of the first of the Bourbon monarchs, was an edifice whose exterior possessed little claim to admiration. Originally a stronghold of the Moorish kings, after it had fallen into the hands of the conquering descendants of Pelayo, it had been used by its new masters as a hunting-seat,—a purpose for which it was well qualified, from the immense forest which then clothed the country in its neighbourhood. It was this which first attracted to it the notice of Charles V., who deserted for it Valladolid; while his son Philip manifested even a stronger attachment to the spot, probably from the associations of early boyhood. At his hands the Moorish Alcazar received many additions and improvements, and became from that day the court residence.

Still, after all, there was little attractive. The front was a long unornamented pile, terminated at either end by a tower, and having a third in its centre, through which a gateway led to two courts in the interior. The extent of the structure invested it to a certain degree with that dignity which mere size seldom fails to confer; but beyond this there was nothing to admire, and the building bore evident traces of being the patch-work construction of successive masters. The front itself was of stone, while the towers at either end were of brick; but even they were not finished. That towards the river terminated in a spire and gilt vane, somewhat in the style of the Renaissance; while its companions, on the contrary, in the centre and at the further end of the façade, though carried up as high as the top of the stone-work, had been left uncompleted, and were covered by a flat ungainly roof of tile and wood-work. The same slovenliness of character exhibited itself in the court-yard in front, which, though of immense size, was surrounded by buildings of the most paltry description, one story in height, and forming the barracks of the Spanish and Walloon Guard.

Towards the river the building had a more graceful character. That portion of it had been the work of its Moorish founders, and its numerous and irregular towers had all those claims to the picturesque which the Saracenic architecture generally bestows. Below, the ground sunk rapidly to the Manzanares; the steep declivity being covered to the very edge of the water by forest timber and brushwood.

The interior of the palace, as we have already mentioned, consisted of two courtyards. That on the left, as you entered, and towards the river, contained the apartments of the royal family; and was surrounded by a double balcony, which formed the favourite lounge of a numerous tribe in Spain—the place-hunters. The court-yard on the right was appropriated to the ministers and other officials connected with the government.

It is to an apartment in the latter that we have now to conduct the reader.

The room was of large dimensions. Fire-place there was none; but its want was supplied by a brazier of ornamented iron-work,

heaped with charcoal. The walls were covered with Moorish velvet, which, suspended from the roof in long and loose folds, draped the room all round, and rested on the floor. In one portion only the hangings were looped up, and left to view a massive door of walnutwood, furnished on the inside with bolts large and heavy enough to signify that danger was to be apprehended even in the halls of princes. In other respects the chamber was little decorated,—a solitary picture, a master-piece of Murillo, representing a martyred saint, being its only ornament. The rest of the furniture was of corresponding simplicity. On either side of the brazier, and at equal distances, stood large tables of walnut-wood, loaded with papers, while some high-backed chairs formed their accompaniments.

It was the afternoon of the day whose events we have chronicled in the last chapter. Beside one of the tables sat a man about fiftysix years of age. He was of low stature, with broad shoulders and short neck. The head was very large, the person stout, the complexion swarthy. The face was nearly square, the eye deep set, bold. and piercing; the forehead prominent and lofty, the mouth small and handsome, but, from the pressure of its lower jaw, showing indisputable evidence of decision. The general expression of the countenance seemed that of an easy-tempered bon vivant. On the present occasion, however, it had lost its usual joyous character, for the eyebrow lowered, and every feature was impressed with a deep melancholy. On the upper lip was a moustache, and in the centre of the chin a tuft of hair occasionally worn at the present day by military fops, and called an *imperial*. But the dress of the solitary occupant of the chamber showed that he was a son not of the sword. but of the Church, for a skull-cap was on his head, while the rest of his person was enveloped in a Cardinal's robe. It was the prime minister of Spain—Alberoni.

'Yes,' said he to himself, as he raised his head from his hand, and sank back in his chair, 'let fools or sceptics say what they will, there is a God and he is just. It is scarcrly five years since I committed my great crime, and now follows its punishment. I came to this country unknown and a beggar. Anne de la Tremouille found me in my obscurity—employed me—raised me; gave me wealth, position, and influence; and how did I repay her? The adder became warmed, and stung the hand that cherished it. Well, I had the reward I hoped for. I became Bishop, Archbishop, Cardinal, Grandee, Prime Minister of Spain. I brought to my new office talents and energies which those miserable descendants of the Goths never dreamt of. I found ruined docks, disorganized troops—an empty treasury. I reformed all this. I gave to the country fleets, armies, wealth, a material power which was never surpassed even in the days of her great emperor, and which should have bestowed a dominion greater than that emperor ever possessed. And what has been the result? Nothing but ruin and disgrace. The rope which I had twisted so carefully has proved itself of sand. The mighty enterprises which I had devised with such apparent promise of success have failed. The

treachery of the agent, the bullet of the assassin, the very winds of heaven, the hand of man and God have combined to mar my work: and now comes this last disgrace—this day's dishonour—to cap all the rest; and I, a prince of the Church and prime minister of Spain, have been scourged-struck-spit on, as if I were the vilest beggar that crawls within its confines. It is sufficient to shake reason in its seat, and make me mad—mad!'

The recollection seemed to overwhelm the unhappy man, for, burying his face in his hands, he let his head sink upon the table, as

if in the extremity of despair.

His sorrow was interrupted by a gentle tap at the door. The sound seemed to recall the Cardinal at once to himself, for he sprang to his feet, and while his face crimsoned with passion, he asked, in a voice of thunder, who was there. The door opened in reply to the summons, and an ecclesiastic, in the dress of a canon of the Church, entered the room.

The new comer was a man about fifty, with a face and person which must in youth have been strikingly handsome, but habits of long-continued dissipation had left their trace upon both. Still the expression was an agreeable one; it was frank, honest, kind-hearted, that, in short, of one, who, to use a common phrase, is his own worst enemy. The man closed the door gently, and having done so, stood silently surveying the Cardinal with a glance which bespoke strong affection and sympathy. His appearance seemed at once to have relieved Alberoni from the momentary constraint which he had put upon himself, for his face resumed its mournful expression, and with a faintly uttered, 'Is it you, Di Castro?' he again sank back in his 'Yes, your Eminence, it is I,' was the answer, and it was uttered in tones as low as the observation that had awakened it. There was again silence for about a minute; the new comer stood, as if in embarrassment, gazing at the floor, and endeavouring to conceal his agitation by playing with the large broad-brimmed hat which forms the appendage of the Spanish clergy. The Cardinal broke silence-

'You have heard the news?' said he. There was no answer.

'God's curse!' said the impatient prelate; 'have you lost your tongue, man? Answer me, I tell you, and at once. Again I ask, have you heard the news? Di Castro bowed.

'I doubted it not,' said Alberoni. 'I might have guessed it. Arcos and Santa Cruz were present, and they hate me too bitterly not to have, by this time, circulated it through all Madrid. Yes, Di Castro,' continued he, 'this day, in the king's presence, the Grand Chamberlain struck me with his stick!—me, a prince of the Church! —me, the prime minister of Spain!'

'It is scarce credible,' replied his companion; 'I had heard a whisper of it in the streets, and hurried hither in order that I might have it disproved from your Eminence's lips.' 'No, it is true;

true as holy writ.'

'And what could have led on the Duke of Escalona to such an

outrage? A man so grave, so cautious, so broken by years.' You forget the one quality which is the cause of all. You should have added, a man who is a Spanish noble. You know how they hate me, these grandees; indolent, ignorant, without either intelligence of mind or activity of person, they are energetic only in their jealousy. Under their rule, for a century, the affairs of the kingdom have decayed. I have given Spain back power and wealth and position, and her children detest me for having done for them what they could not do for themselves.'

'True, your Eminence, but this I knew before. What I would

learn is the immediate cause of this unheard-of violence.'

'Then, hear it now. You know the miserable creature that we have for a king;—shy, timid, obstinate;—a man who has not an idea beyond his wife and his breviary. You know also the hotheaded, reckless countrywoman of ours to whom I married him?' Di Castro bowed.

'It is through them I rule this kingdom. He obeys me because he is her slave; and she obeys me because an Italian, like ourselves, coming from the same duchy, speaking the same language, and the object of the same animosities, she knows and feels that it is only through me, a countryman of her own, that she can retain her authority.'

'All true, your Eminence; but, again, will you pardon me when I say, what has this to do with the outrage of the Duke of Escalona?'

'Are you so dull, Di Castro? Can you not guess its cause? Do you not see that the queen and I have but one common interest and one common means of giving effect to it. This miserable creature that we call king—this crowned monk, who would have established in the court of Spain its monastic ceremonial, even if his bigot predecessor Philip II. had not established it before him—is our captive, our slave. He sees but with our eyes, he hears but with our ears, and he knows nothing more of what goes on beyond the walls of his palace, than we find it convenient to our interest that he should know. Does not your dull, stupid intellect, teach you, that if any other man than myself could obtain access to him in a quarter of an hour's conversation he might suggest to his suspicious nature, doubts as to the excellence of the government of his queen and his prime minister?'

' And the Duke of Escalona—

'He wished to be that man. The king, as you know, has been ill, and the duke, as grand chamberlain, according to some wretched Court etiquette, has, it seems, the right to see the medicine administered. This was a mere pretence, but it answered as an excuse for having a private conference with Philip. The duke demanded to exercise his privilege. By the queen's orders and mine he was refused permission to enter, but the insolent old man pushed aside the usher at the door, and forcibly made his way into the room. The king was sitting on his bed. The duke approached him, no doubt with a purpose of pouring into the royal ear some of the

thousand complaints which he and his brother grandees are circulating daily at Madrid. I saw the danger—intercepted him and laid my hand upon his arm. What do you think, Di Castro? By heavens it is true! the scoundrel struck me several times over the head with his cane.'

'Impossible!'

'True as I am a living man; he struck me, I tell you, till from sheer exhaustion he sank into a chair.'

'And what followed?' 'Her Majesty, scandalised at the disgraceful scene, made a sign to the Duke of Arcos and the Marquis of Santa Cruz, and they forcibly removed him from the room.'

'And what did the king?' 'What did the king, asked you;' replied the Cardinal, in a burst of passion, 'nothing, positively nothing. The idiot sat in his bed gaping at us in terror and astonishment, but without moving a limb or uttering a word.'

'And this is the end of it?' 'No, it is only the beginning. You have already told me that the story is circulated over Madrid. Who can tell what will be its result? It may prove my ruin.'

'Pshaw! your Eminence,' said his companion, in a tone of well-affected cheerfulness, 'you overrate the evil. When the English destroyed your fleet on the coast of Sicily, and the Duke of Orleans seized Cellamare, and prevented the rebellion you wished to create in France, you met with greater misfortunes.'

'You are wrong. The misfortunes were not greater. They brought with them only loss, this brings dishonour; and the minister who is despised is lost, lost, lost.' And overwhelmed as it were by the magnitude of the calamity, the Cardinal once more sank down in his chair and buried his face in his hands.

His companion looked at him with compassionating eyes, and there was a silence for some minutes.

'I have never,' said Di Castro at length, and in a tone of strong affection, 'I have never before seen your Eminence so depressed. The future is not so black as you would make it. It is your distempered mind which gives gloominess and grandeur to its outlines. You are ill—'

'It may be so, Di Castro, said Alberoni, after a pause. 'The mind may lend its influence, yet who at will can annihilate its agency? Have you never felt a presentiment of coming sorrow? Have you never, at certain moments of your life, been imbued with the belief that there is some being in the world who has been created to be your evil genius? Days may pass away—weeks—months—years—and we may think not of such a being, but suddenly, and when there is apparently nothing to suggest its presence, the hated vision comes before us—its dim shadowy features brightened up for the moment with a smile of triumph. Have you not felt that such a vision is a certain intimation of future evil? Such a warning have I had now. Last night Anne de la Tremouille stood before me as distinct to my eyes as when we parted at Xadraca. As they dragged her to her carriage she then turned round and said, "Julio Alberoni, your hour will

come." Last night I tell you I saw her again. The attitude—the expression—the smile of hatred was the same. I knew it foreboded disaster, and it has come. The loss of the fleet—the conquest of Sicily—the death of Charles XII.—the failure of the Jacobite invasion—the abortive rebellion in France—even the disgrace of having hostile troops in the country of which I am minister—all have come upon me in the last six months; and each has served, in its turn, to herald some future and greater sorrow: and this day's disgrace, cruel as it is, is but the forerunner of some approaching and still mightier catastrophe.'

'Your Eminence,' said Di Castro, in a cheerful tone, 'sees these things in too gloomy a light. I laugh at calamities that have no

better precursors than a dream.'

'You are wrong, Di Castro. Anne de la Tremouille is not one of those who would entrust her vengeance to the hand of others. Fate may be powerful enough in itself, but she will, at least, do her best to aid it. It was but three days ago that I received two couriers from the frontier, and each bore important despatches.'

'From whom?' 'The first was from Argenson. The Lieutenant of Police of his royal highness Philip Bourbon, Duke of Orleans and Regent of France, furnishes, for a consideration, information to the minister of his trusty and well-beloved cousin, Philip Bourbon, king of Spain.'

'And what said Argenson?' 'Judge for yourself,' said the Cardinal, as he handed to Di Castro a letter; 'Read that aloud and judge.'

The canon read as follows:--

### 'No. X.

' The Abbot of the Filles de la Croix to the Dean of St. Isidro.

'For the information of those whom it may concern, and of holy church, I have to state, that it has been decided by the barber's son and his English gossip, that a private emissary should be dispatched immediately to the deanery for the purpose of sending back Italians to Italy. It was arranged, moreover, as I anticipated (Vide No. VII.), that such emissary should be a countryman of the gossip's, and amply provided with money and letters of recommendation to the curate and the good man's wife. I have since learned that a youngster (the gossip's friend), who arrived here secretly, and remained for a week, during which time he was visited thrice by the barber's son, and twice by the gossip, has since left suddenly, and taken the south road. If he go beyond the parish boundary, it will probably be in disguise.

'N.B.—I have been informed that two women, the elderly dame and another, saw the youngster before starting.'

Di Castro laid down the letter, but with a look which testified distinctly enough that he had not drawn any idea from its contents.

'You do not understand it?' said the Cardinal. The priest shook his head.

'Cospetto, man! a child might understand it; if he knew from whom it came, and to whom it was sent.'

'Yet,' said his companion, with a laugh, 'my more than childlike intelligence can make nothing of it. Who, in the name of all the

gods is the barber's son?' 'The Cardinal Dubois, sole offspring of the barbier-medecin of Breves-la-Gaillarde, Jean Dubois, and Marie Dujoyet his wife.'

'And the English gossip?' 'Lord Stanhope, the British ambas-

sador.'

'And the good man's wife?' 'Our most gracious sovereign, Elizabeth Farnese, born princess of Parma.'

'And the curate?' 'That scoundrel Jesuit, D'Aubenton, the

father confessor.'

'Now I begin to comprehend. So you fear an attempt being made by the French and English Courts to send you back to Italy; for you of course are the Italian.'

'Ha! your Bœotian instinct has discovered that, has it? Yes; I am the Italian. The danger, you see, is pressing.' 'I see nothing

of the sort.'

'Pooh! you are duller than I took you to be. What is George the First?' 'King of Great Britain to be sure.'

'And Philip, Duke of Orleans?' 'Why regent of France.'

'Precisely.' Both are in possession of what they are not entitled to. The Stuarts are the legitimate sovereigns of England, and our master, Philip V., is uncle to Louis XV., and has a better claim to the regency of France than the Duke of Orleans, who is only his third cousin; and neither the regent nor the king of England can forget that I have endeavoured to send back, the one to the Palais Royal, and the other to his electorate.'

But you are at peace with both.' 'So much the worse. These times of professed friendships are more dangerous than open war.'

'Yet there is nothing in the letter that threatens immediate danger.' 'Wrong again. There is one phrase in the letter which tells me that the danger is immediate. Did you remark the postscript?'

'Yes, something about an old woman and a young one.' 'No, Di Castro. It was the old woman;—my sworn enemy, the Princess of Ursins. When she lends her spoon to stir the pot, the broth is like to be scalding.'

'Pshaw! the thought of the princess ever fills your head with

foolish fancies. You will hear no more of this emissary.'

'Why you idiot, he is, I suspect, already past the frontier. Three days ago I got a letter from the curate of Irun, informing me that a young man, dressed as a contrabandista, had passed through on his way to the south. He, I have no doubt, is the fellow; but I have limed a twig for him, and have had orders sent to every gate to have him arrested as soon as he makes his appearance. What puzzles me most in the matter is, that the curate mentions that two lady travellers left Irun along with him. If my man be really Lord Stanhope's agent, who the ladies are I cannot guess, for I know that the princess dare not venture into Spain.'

'And what if I can inform your Eminence?'

'Oh, per Bacco! Benedict, that would be too absurd. You, a drunken sot of a canon, to discover what has puzzled the prime

minister of Spain! Why, man, this is political. Had it been a matter touching the flavour of a cask of Valdepenas, or the shape of

well-turned ankle, I might have applied to you.'

'It is precisely because there is a woman in the case that I can aid your Eminence. You remember some thirty years ago, that after finishing my studies at the seminary at Parma, and taking orders, I went to Naples. There I became the confessor of a lady of the name of Donna Violante, the widow of an avocato.'

- 'You were her lover!' 'I was her confessor,' replied Benedict, with a smile. 'But to the matter in hand. Donna Violante was well connected, and twelve years since, when the Duke of Escalona was viceroy of Naples, she was appointed governess to his granddaughter, then a child of eight years of age. The girl became attached to her duenna, and the Neapolitan, upon the duke's giving up the viceroyalty, accompanied the family to Madrid, and there she and her confessor renewed their former acquaintance. For a year past she has been in France with her young charge, but by a message from her to-day, I learn that they have just returned, and something whispers to me that they are the lady travellers chronicled by the curate of Irun.'
- 'Ah, ha,' said the Cardinal, 'then the meeting there with Stanhope's envoy was no chance one. Escalona's eldest son married a niece of the Princess of Ursins, and this girl has no doubt been employed as a messenger between the seditious grandee and my old enemy. Away man to the duke's palace. Away at once, I say. Renew your intimacy with your penitent; praise once more her bright eyes; the compliment will be the more valued as she must be old and ugly by this time, and gather from her woman's vanity everything you can learn of the plotting.'

Di Castro was about to leave the room, when a signal from Albe-

roni's finger arrested him.

'Stop,' said the Cardinal, 'a thought occurs to me. Let me see once more Argenson's letter. So, so,' muttered he, 'Stanhope's agent is instructed to address himself to the queen and the father confessor. I will make sure of one of them. Di Castro, my old friend,' continued he aloud, and in a coaxing voice, 'you are going to become a great man; I have decided on making you confessor to Philip V.'

The information seemed to give anything but pleasure to his companion, for he started back and looked the picture of consterna-

tion.

'Why, you fool, what is the matter with you? One would suppose that you had seen the Medusa's head. Do you know what I offer you? The first post in the kingdom, after my own.'

Di Castro groaned.

'A salary,' continued the Cardinal, 'of a thousand ducats a month, apartments in the palace, one of the royal carriages, and a daily table of six covers.'

The enumeration of the perquisites of office seemed to make no

favourable impression upon the confidant, for he looked piteously at the prime minister, and twirled with great energy his shovel hat.

'What in the name of all the gods ails the man?' shouted Alberoni, yielding to the impulse of his Italian temperament, and his face purple with anger. 'Why, what more would you have, you fool? You will spend your days in the halls of a palace, and will associate with the first nobility in Europe—the grandees of Spain.'

'I had rather spend them in a pot-house with the officers of the Walloon Guard. They are better company, and I suspect the ho-

nester fellows of the two.'

'You will have the direction of the conscience of royalty. There's honour for you, you rogue!'

'You made my old chum, Domenico di Guerra, confessor to the queen, and he tells me he has been miserable ever since.'

'But it is not the queen: it is the king who is to be your penitent.'

'I am the more sorry for it. I would rather confess a woman than a man any day. The queen, if she is fretful, petulant, and changeable, is at least young and handsome; but the king'—and Di Castro stopped suddenly, and shrugged his shoulders.

'Cospetto! man; you will have nothing to do. His Majesty is

devout.'

'So much the worse for the confessor. I would undertake fifty swash bucklers more willingly. The fellows make a clean breast of it, and there's an end. You see nothing of them again for a twelvemonth. But our devout sovereign is trembling for his soul every five minutes. It would be the death of me. I could never stand the fatigue.' 'Pooh! man; you would get accustomed to him.'

'But I have my suspicions he would not get accustomed to me. I dine at mid-day, and '—and Di Castro stopped suddenly and

coloured.

'And the dinner,' said the Cardinal, continuing the sentence, is followed by four bottles of Valdepenas, and then you doubt your power of discussing minute points of theology. Ah! Benedict Benedict, you are the old man still.' And the easy-tempered prelate laughed and shook his head.

'Your Eminence sees, then,' said his companion, 'that the thing

is impossible.'

'I see nothing of the sort,' replied the immovable Cardinal. 'You have only to bolt your door, and if the king send for you, say through the keyhole that you are meditating on St. Augustin, and cannot come. He will like you all the better for your refusal.'

'But I can't be always meditating on St. Augustin. If I am

father confessor, I must sometimes confess.'

'True; but you can tell Philip that confession is only orthodox in the morning, for that then men are most pure. In your case it will be true to the letter, for you will have slept off your debauch and be sober.'

It seemed as if Di Castro were anxious to oblige his patron, for he pendered long and deeply on the proposal; but reflection did not

appear to give him a higher relish for the honours thus thrust upon him; and at length, in his usual abrupt manner, he broke forth—

'No, no, Julio; it will not do. I will have none of your confessorships. And where is the necessity? Why put me into an office I detest?' 'Because I must dismiss D'Aubenton.'

'And why dismiss D'Aubenton?' 'Because I fear his doing me a mischief with the king. He has never forgiven me cheating him of the cardinal's hat I promised him.'

'Then why cheat him of his cardinal's hat? Why break your

word? The falsehood was a sin.'

'In this case, my dear Benedict, it was worse; it was a blunder. But I must repair the error by putting it out of the fellow's power to injure me; and he will if he can. He is a Jesuit;—a cold-blooded, canting, scheming, ambitious, greedy priest, who looks as if he would put rats'-bane into one's soup, and—' But the vituperations of the Cardinal were suddenly interrupted, for a servant in the royal livery opened the door and announced 'His revergence the father confessor.'

# CHAPTER XX.

### THE FATHER CONFESSOR.

SCARCELY had the announcement been made when a priest entered the room. He was a little thin man, of about sixty, but years seemed not to have impaired his mental or bodily energies. The face, in common parlance, possessed no beauty, but there was something in its expression, and in the possessed calmness of its deep set dark gray eve which gave it a character of power that made the spectator forget, or be unconscious of the plainness of the features. The step was stealthy and cat-like, and the manner apparently one which could borrow its character from the feeling of the moment, or rather, for the word feeling is little applicable, from what the interest of the party dictated as most suitable to the circumstances. The new comer was plainly dressed, in a long dark robe, and wore on his head the shovel hat which forms the distinguishing feature of the secular clergy of the Peninsula, and which had been adopted for the order of Jesus, probably from old associations, by its Spanish founder. This he now doffed, and with an expression in which sorrow was blended with humility, advanced towards Alberoni.

The announcement of the confessor of the king had been made rather unexpectedly, and at the very instant when the prime minister was 'employed in enumerating, for the benefit of his colleague, the thousand evil qualities of the director of the royal conscience; but the Cardinal was too much of a Machiavel, and had served too long an apprenticeship as a courtier, to be taken by surprise. It was, therefore, with a face beaming with smiles that he rose from his seat, and hurried to the door to meet his visitor. Even Di Castro, whose blunt, outspoken temper made him not unfrequently forget the reverence due to the prime minister, seemed to feel the influence of the new comer, for he recalled at once the

conventional proprieties of priestly manner, drew himself up to his full height, and assumed a cold formal bearing, such as suited one of the lower orders of the clergy in the presence of a prince of the Church; and, when a moment after, he received from his patron a glance of the eye which commanded his departure, he glided from the apartment with a profoundness of obeisance, and a sliding noise-lessness of step, which could not have been exceeded by the most accomplished acolyte of the Sacred College.

D'Aubenton, during the short period that Di Castro remained in the room, had not uttered a syllable, but had confined his communications with the Cardinal to a glance of the eye, which conveyed, or was intended to convey, deep sorrow. No sooner, however, did the door close on the retreating footsteps, than he hurried forward, and seizing Alberoni's hand between his own, exclaimed, in a low.

well-modulated tone of intense anguish-

'Ah! your Eminence, what a day of grief and mortification, for me,—for the Sacred College,—for the entire Christian Church!'

'Alas, my friend,' replied the Cardinal, returning the pressure of the hand with equal affection, 'it has been a black day for Christianity; but what will you? It is the part of the ministers of the cross to suffer. From the earliest ages they have been exposed

to martyrdom at the hands of misjudging and sinful men.'

'It may be so,' said D'Aubenton; 'and yet the resignation of the martyr, admirable and edifying as it is, should in no degree blind us to the unwarranted violence of the act from which he suffers. I cannot express to your Eminence the horror with which I heard of it, and I hurried hither to repeat to you my regrets, and offer my consolation.'

'Neither, reverend father, are [needed by me; it was not I that was injured, but the Church; or rather, I should say, that distinguished member of it who in fact rules the Spanish monarchy. Father D'Aubenton is the confessor of the king and the master of his mind and of his acts. It was his influence—the legitimate influence of the spiritual director of royalty—which the Spanish nobles attacked in my person.'

'Your Eminence pays me a compliment which I do not deserve; I have no share in the government and possess no power—a poor

priest, who thinks of nothing but his breviary.'

'You speak, holy father, with unnecessary humility; he who has a right to know the private thoughts of kings, is best able to guide them.'

'Yet, your Eminence, it is indisputable that for the last hundred years the affairs of Spain have gone but ill, and notwithstanding, it has been generally alleged that my predecessors in office had much to do with their management.'

'Your observation is just, but the royal confessors were then Dominicans; gross, bigoted, uneducated Dominicans. Philip V has the happiness to have for the director of his conscience a member of the Order of Jesus—that Order which has long been recognised as the essence of mind, and energy, and wisdom.' D'Aubenton made

a slight bow.

'Does not that Order,' continued the Cardinal, 'everywhere breathe not only its spirit into the councils of its children, but give them success? The reign of Louis XIV. was the most glorious that Europe has witnessed for centuries. What made it so? It was guided by the maxims of Loyola. It was watched over by his disciples, Pères La Chaise and Le Tellier.'

Again D'Aubenton smiled slightly, and a shade of irony came across his features, as if he mocked at the idea of his being bought by flattery. Once more, however, his face resumed its usual

calm expression, and in his ordinary quiet tone, he said-

'And what, after the outrage offered to your Eminence, do you propose to do?' 'What do I propose to do?' and Alberoni looked interrogatively.

'Do you intend, pardon me the question, to withdraw from his Majesty the benefit of your services?' 'What could suggest an

idea so extraordinary?'

'I fear it may have occurred to his Majesty. He asked me, but a few minutes bygone, if the feeling of the other grandees towards his prime minister were as violent as that which had been this morning exhibited by the Duke of Escalona?'

'Ha!' said the Cardinal, and notwithstanding his habitual self-command, the colour mounted to his cheeks, and in a tone which

slightly betrayed anxiety, he said-

'And what replied your reverence?' 'Nothing.'

'Nothing!' repeated the Cardinal, with something of irritation; 'I should have hoped that in one whom I know to be so sincerely my friend, I should have found a defender of my policy.'

'No one could be a more attached friend of your Eminence than I am,' said D'Aubenton; 'but, as I said before, I have no acquaintance with politics, and do not interfere with what concerns me not.'

'True, true, I had forgotten,' said the Cardinal, in a tone of well-acted simplicity, 'I had for a moment forgotten your unworldliness, and your devotion to your profession. And what further said his Majesty?' 'Nothing.'

But what meant he by the observation you have just repeated?

'It is not for me to fathom the thoughts of princes.'

'My dear D'Aubenton,' said the Cardinal, pressing his hands with affection, 'I can easily comprehend that in matters so unconnected with your holy duties, you take but slight interest; yet to me I know you will be frank. Had you been compelled to give your attention to so ungrateful a subject, what inference would you have drawn from the king's remarks?'

'Why, your Eminence,' said D'Aubenton, in a tone of affectionate confidence, 'it is painful to my feelings to give utterance to the thought—but from you, my dear friend, I conceal nothing, and to you I will say that it appeared to me that his Majesty had, for the moment, the intention of withdrawing his confidence from the

distinguished man who now conducts the affairs of Spain, and giving it to one of her own native-born nobles.'

'To a grandee, in short?' 'To a grandee!'

The two looked at each other, but in vain. The faces of both were so well drilled that neither gave evidence of any internal

feeling. The Cardinal again broke silence.

'Such a government, my dear friend, would be impossible. Our sovereign is a Catholic king, and, besides Spain and the Indies, his territories occupy two-thirds of Italy. With Naples and the Milanese on either side of the States of the Church, he is brought into constant contact with the Holy Father, and it is thus necessary that one of the Sacred College should be at the head of our affairs. It was thus that under the old dynasty, the government was administered by Ximenes and the Cardinal Duke of Lerma. The short reign of the new race has required the services of Porto Carrero, Del Giudice and myself. Nay, even the intrusive monarch who, for eight years, by the assistance of the English, kept his ground in the Peninsula, was obliged to succumb to the same universal rule of policy, and place his administration in the hands of Cardinal Sala. You see, then, my dear friend, that the government you speak of would be impossible.'

'Not altogether,' said D'Aubenton, in a quiet tone.

'Yes, altogether, for, except myself, there is now not a prince of the Church in Spain.'

'It is true. But Philip is a zealous supporter of the Triple Crown, and to such the Triple Crown is generous.' 'What mean you?'

'That if the king asked of the pope to add to the number of the

Sacred College, his Holiness might possibly comply.'

'Ha!' continued the Cardinal, unable, notwithstanding his best efforts, to control his emotion; 'who is the man to be recommended for the purple?' 'It would,' said D'Aubenton, with a simper, 'be too high an honour for the humble person who now addresses you, and yet, it might be that the grace is intended for him.'

'You!' said Alberoni, with a burst of astonishment and vexation,

which it was impossible for him to conceal.

'Yes, I,' quietly replied D'Aubenton. 'Your Eminence may recollect that you once did me the undeserved kindness to propose mentioning my name to the Holy Father as that of a fit and proper person to receive the honour; and the judgment of your Eminence is so universally allowed to be correct, that it may, possibly, have suggested the idea to others.'

Once more the minister stood aghast at the revelation, but he was

not a man to abandon easily the game, and he resumed:—

'Well, my dear friend, there is no denying it. There is no one so well entitled to the highest dignities of the Church as yourself; but it mortifies deeply, most deeply, my feelings of friendship and affection that you should think of owing it to other hands than mine. You know I promised to get you the purple.' 'Yes, you promised it.'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;It was some—' 'Three years ago.'

'True, true,' said the conscience-stricken minister, 'and I should have obtained it for you; but will you pardon me the error, if it be one? I thought you were too deeply wrapt up in the sacred duties of your calling to care for such vanities. A Cardinal's robe, my dear friend——'

'Is what I think your Eminence is wearing at the present moment.'
'True—true—true,' said Alberoni, colouring to the temples.

But my case was different; I was positively forced to accept it.

'The sacrifice,' said D'Aubenton, in his usual quiet tone, 'must have been most painful to your feelings. But may I ask the reason why it was made?' 'The rank was necessary to enable me to be prime minister.'

'His Majesty had before created you a grandee, and, if I remember aright, Olivarez, Medina Celi, and others who have been at

the head of the government of Spain, held no higher rank.'

'Ah, my dear friend, do you not see the difference? The Guzmans and La Cerdas were members of the most distinguished houses in Castile, while I was a new man. It was only as a prince of the Church that I could put myself on a footing with the old nobility.'

D'Aubenton smiled, but said nothing.

'And now, my dear friend,' continued the Cardinal, 'I trust I have satisfied you that if I accepted honours for myself, and omitted securing them for you, I was the victim of necessity in the one case, and of delusion in the other. Ah, had I supposed for a moment that you would have accepted such a bauble, how eagerly would I have procured it for you!'

'For the honour itself,' said D'Aubenton, in a tone of affected modesty, 'I care nothing; but, had it come from you, I should have

valued it.'

'Ah, my dear friend, let me still have the felicity of giving you such a testimony of my friendship.'

'It is unnecessary,' said D'Aubenton, coldly. 'I should now

but disappoint the affection of others.'

'Pooh, pooh. What is their affection compared with mine? They aid you to the purple!' said the Cardinal, contemptuously. 'They have not the power. No, no, my dear D'Aubenton, these new allies of yours are a feeble helpless band of intriguers, equally unable to advance efficiently your interests, or conduct with dignity and success the affairs of the government. This is your opinion. This must, I am sure, be your opinion. You will impress it on his Majesty.'

Once more D'Aubenton smiled, and then he added in a tone of affected simplicity, 'Again I repeat, I trouble not myself with such vanities. I interfere not with the affairs of the world, and it would be stepping beyond the just limits of my office to mix myself up

with political intrigue. I will not advise the king.'

Alberoni had been gradually losing his self-command, and for some time he paced backwards and forwards with rapid steps. A

side glance from the eye of his companion showed that his movements were not unremarked, but, beyond that, there was nothing in the marble countenance of the Jesuit that betrayed passion or interest. At length the Cardinal seemed to have formed a resolution, for he suddenly stopped his hurried walk in front of the father confessor.

'D'Aubenton,' said he, 'this is child's play, and unworthy of men like us. Let us throw away our masks and speak frankly. In such a fashion will I address you. In such a fashion will you answer me.'

For some time the father confessor regarded his companion with his cold gray eye. He, too, after a while, appeared to have formed his resolution, for he looked at Alberoni and nodded.

'There is a wish,' said the minister, 'to overturn my govern-

ment?" D'Aubenton gave a sign of assent.

'A party has been formed for that purpose, and it has offered to purchase your co-operation with a Cardinal's hat?' Again the father confessor gave a slight bow.

'Now listen to me,' said Alberoni. 'It is natural that your interest should recommend the acceptance of the offer, but it is doubtful if your new friends have the power to obtain for you the

honour: I have.'

'You said so before.' 'And did not keep my word,' you would add. 'It is true. But I will keep it now, for my own safety requires it. Hark ye. You are a Frenchman. I am an Italian. We are both strangers in this country, and so long as we are united, we can defy opposition. Let them separate us, and we must individually fall. The grandees have promised you the purple. I will bid higher for your aid. I will assure you of that, and more;' and Alberoni approached the confessor, and whispered in his ear, 'I will help you to the Papacy.'

'Pshaw, your Eminence,' said D'Aubenton, with a contemptuous smile. 'You forget that we were to speak without our masks, and you are again playing with me. You would, you say, help me to the chair of St. Peter. What then would become of your own well

known aspirations to the triple crown?' 'I have none.'

An incredulous shake of the head was the reply.

'By heavens,' said the excited Cardinal, in a loud eager tone, 'I

speak the truth. I have no passion for church royalty.'

'Pooh, pooh! You forget my friend, Julio. Your very name is a warrant for the thought. It is a word that hints at Cardinals and Popes—that speaks of ambition and power.'

Then it speaks truly. I have the one, and wish to possess the other. I would, as you allege, tread in the steps of my great namesake, but the should be neither Julius Mazarin the Cardinal, nor

Julius II., the Pope.'

'Who then?' 'A greater than either—the Julius—the first of the Cæsars, not the ecclesiastical, but the lay emperor. Why, man, I have a perfect contempt for all the mummeries of our creed, with its power over distempered imaginations and weak minds. What I

want is real power—the power over living, and strong, and animate bodies, and fleets and armies, and wealthy cities and great kingdoms. I am at present master of Spain. I would be more. I would make Philip regent of France, and through him rule there also. He now holds the Milanese and Naples. I would unite to them by conquest Piedmont, and the mainland of the Venetians, and Tuscany, and the States of the Church, and then—the mayor of the palace to the master of an empire greater than any since the days of Charlemagne—I should have my wish, and be at rest. There I should say is an object worthy of ambition—a fitter, a nobler end to the career of a long life than to rule over a parcel of trembling dotards in the Vatican, who, while they affect to give laws to a distant world, cannot control the mob of the capital they inhabit, or check the excesses of its paltriest nobles.'

'Your Eminence has indeed spoken without mask,' said D'Aubenton, with a laugh, 'and however ill advised I may hold your aspirations, I will not attempt to gainsay them. So once more I will trust you. You will give me the Cardinal's hat and your support

for the greater future.' 'I promise both.'

'Then have no fear of Philip's changing his prime minister, and so I bid you farewell. But you have been outspoken to me, and I will imitate your frankness. You have deceived me once. If you deceive me a second time, remember,' and he held up his finger admonishingly, 'it will be no fault of Claude D'Aubenton if you do not pay the penalty of the treachery.'

He left the room as he spoke, but even ere he had reached the door, the slight colour which had flushed his cheek, and the excitement which had marked his manner during the utterance of his parting warning, had already disappeared, and his face and step had alike resumed their general expression of cold indifference to the

world and its objects.

Alberoni gazed steadily after him till the door had closed upon his visitor.

'I trust him not,' said he to himself, 'I will trust him not. To have my fortune dependent upon a man like that, without feelings, without affections, without principle, is to have the sword of Damocles perpetually suspended over one's head. No charm of the present would compensate for the ever constant fear of the future. No, I must remove him and put Di Castro in his place, and then with king and queen both my own, I shall really be master of Spain and the Indies.'

And the Cardinal once more threw himself into his chair, and abandoned himself to the agreeable visions which his imagination had conjured up of future greatness.

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### A YOUNG LADY AT HOME.

THREE days had elapsed since Clifford's arrival in Madrid. His instructions from Lord Stanhope had been to depend in a great measure, for his movements upon the advice and information derived from the Marquis Scotti, the envoy of the Duke of l'arma. He had been further counselled to exhibit himself in the streets as little as possible, and to avoid any acquaintance or intercourse that chance might fling in his way.

For the first two days these instructions were literally obeyed; but to the young and energetic there is nothing so exhausting as enforced inaction. And Clifford, with his superabundant vitality, soon found

his stay-at-home existence intolerable.

As hour after hour passed on without his receiving any message from the Italian—for he had intimated his arrival to Scotti, and forwarded to him his master's letter—his impatient temper chafed more and more under the imprisonment, and at last he determined, if it were but for an hour, to breathe once more the fresh air of heaven; with the latent hope, that chance might aid his political schemes, or give him some key to the mysterious incidents which had crowded with strange adventure the last ten days of his life.

'Come,' said he to himself, 'I should acquire some little knowledge of my locality. My memories of Madrid are rather faded, and to play my part effectively, in the event of a crisis, it may be as well to renew them. No one can know me here; and to avoid any hazard of an encounter with the officials, I shall select for my promenade the hour of the siesta. The streets will then be as deserted as London at midnight.'

Accordingly, on the third day after his arrival, the young envoy moved forth. To assist him in preserving his incognito, a trunk full of different costumes had been sent from Paris, and awaited his arrival. From this he selected, on the present occasion, the dress with which we are so familiar from the portraits of Titian and Velasquez, and which was still worn by the citizens of Madrid. For the Spaniards true to their Asiatic origin through Phænician and Moor-change with extreme unwillingness their habits, or the character of their clothing; and although Philip V had done his best to introduce the fashion of the Tuileries—the coat, periwig, and three-cornered hat and had enforced it by refusing to receive any one at court in other guise, still the wishes of the sovereign had exercised little influence over the general population. As in the days of the princes of the house of Austria, the Madrilenos still adhered to the tight velvet breeches, the doublet, the cloak, the broad-brimmed plumed hat, and the long rapier; and it was in such a dress that Clifford made his way into the Calle Alcala.

It was about two o'clock. Everything was silent in the sleeping city. The heats of summer were past, but the sun of a November day, blazing forth from an unclouded sky, still produced a temperature that was agreeable.

Clifford turned to the right, and made his way, by the Puerta del Sol, towards the palace. He did not, however, venture to approach its immediate neighbourhood, but continued his stroll towards the bridge of Segovia. He then re-entered the city, and took his road homewards by the end of the Calle de los Cuchilleros, one of the streets at the back of the Calle de Toledo. As he crossed it, two

women came up the street, as if from the Plaza Mayor.

They were the usual dress of the townsfolks—the saya, or upper petticoat, used for going out of doors, of black silk; with mantillas of the same colour. To a common eye there might have been in their appearance nothing remarkable, but to the English envoy it was evident, at the first glance, that the younger of the figures, at least, was that of one of the companions of his journey, Donna Teresa. The recognition seemed to be mutual, though apparently little welcome, for the young lady drew her mantilla more closely round her, and, turning back, hastily retraced her steps at a pace which, if not a run, approached as nearly to it as well might be.

The speed, the agitation, and the unconcealed desire to avoid him, would have satisfied Clifford, had he doubted the justice of his conjectures, and he hurried after the flying fair ones. The reasons for the pursuit were, in fact, various. Something might be attributed to a wish to penetrate the mystery which had hitherto surrounded parties who had taken so deep an interest in his movements, and who seemed to possess a power of carrying their kindly intentions into action, such as was hardly consistent with the very modest

position in society which they had affected.

But there were other and more powerful causes than mere curiosity. The scene at the inn at Buitrago may be in the recollection of our readers, and they may remember the declaration of love made by the contrabandista to his fair companion. Yet short as the acquaintance had been, the feeling was not, as it might have been supposed, one of momentary passion. The beauty, the manners, the intellect of Donna Teresa, had fascinated Colonel Clifford, notwithstanding his best efforts, or, to say the truth, his determination

to the contrary.

In vain had he repeated to himself a thousand times that he knew nothing of her real disposition, her family, her connections—it might be even her name—and that, under such circumstances, it was folly to attach himself to one who might so little deserve it. In the case of the young envoy, as in that of all others who have come under the sway of Dan Cupid, love overruled discretion. But though he had poured forth his passion, and, if the young lady's agitation were to be considered as evidence, to no unwilling ears, yet he had met no reply. The interruption, occasioned apparently by Perez and his fellow Gitano, had brought the conference to a close at a moment when its interest was the greatest, and he had been left in doubt as to whether he might, or might not, hope for a return to his affection—a doubt the more painful as, from the day of his imprisonment in the Moorish tower, he had lost all clue to his fair.

enslaver's residence, and nearly all expectation of meeting her

again.

It may be well understood then with what intense eagerness he availed himself of the unexpected good fortune which chance had afforded him, of renewing his acquaintance with one whom he had feared was lost to him for ever. With rapid steps, accordingly, did he follow Therese and her companion. The approach of the cavalier seemed to alarm the fugitives, for their pace became more accelerated. Still there was little prospect of their being able to escape the enforced interview. The street was long and deserted, and on one side was flanked by a high wall, apparently, from the perfume of the flowers and the branches of the trees which showed themselves over it, the boundary of extensive gardens.

'They move well,' said Clifford to himself; 'but it is useless labour. Long before they get to the end of the wall I must overtake them, and then my little beauty shall tell me who she is, and what she is, and what her connection with the gipsies, and her

power over the tribe.'

He was disappointed, however, in his speculations. The ladies stopped suddenly, and one of them applied a key to a door in the wall, which, from its being painted of the same colour as the stonework, had escaped Clifford's notice. It opened, and the ladies hurried in. The key was speedily extracted from the lock, and was applied on the other side, but such was the agitation of the fair janitor, that she was unable, for a while, to fix it in its socket. The delay was favourable to her pursuer. He had hurried forward on her disappearance, and just as the young girl, who had contrived, at length, to get the key into the lock, was closing the door, with the happy belief of her achieved safety, Clifford arrived in time to plant his foot between the door-post and the door, and prevent its closing.

A desperate struggle ensued. The two women made strenuous efforts to shut the gate, and the cavalier on the outside offered a resistance equally determined. The male power, however, proved the stronger of the two. The fair arms inside became less energetic in their opposition; and at length finding that, in spite of them, the door was, bit by bit, offering greater facilities to the entrance of their adversary, they abandoned all hope of successful resistance,

and moved off as fast as their limbs could carry them.

Clifford entered, and looked around. He found himself in a garden, covered mostly with turf, but having its park-like character diversified by long and straight alleys, bordered with orange-trees. These crossed each other at right angles in the centre of the garden, and the point of contact had been ornamented by a basin of white marble, into which gushed a stream of limpid water from the jaws of lions, exquisitely sculptured from the same material.

All this Clifford barely remarked, for the ladies had run off at full speed, and he did his best to overtake them. On reaching the fountain the two dames separated. The elder took to the right, while the younger hurried down the main avenue towards a large

palace-looking building at the end of it. She gained it in safety, and made her way through a half-open door. As soon as she had reached the hall inside, she paused for breath, apparently in the belief that her pursuer would not venture to enter the mansion. She was deceived, however. The impetuous traveller rushed in after her. Startled by his appearance, she once more resumed her flight, and took refuge in a large chamber adjoining.

It was hung with tapestry, and had a music-gallery over the door, while at the further end was a canopy—a piece of decorative furniture jealously confined to the residences of the grandees. The roof was richly carved and gilded, and the panels into which it was divided filled with paintings by the first masters. This retreat did not prove safer than the other, for the young soldier, without hesi-

tating, entered the room.

He found the girl standing by a table in the middle of the apartment. As there was no other door to the chamber than that by which she had obtained access, she probably felt that escape was

hopeless, and calmly awaited the approach of her pursuer.

'So, fair lady,' said Clifford, as he removed his hat, and approached, with great respect, the beautiful being before him—'the stag is brought to bay at last. By my honour, a long chase and a hard one.'

'I am astonished, sir cavalier,' was the reply, 'that you have the assurance to mention it in so triumphant a tone. What right have you to follow a senorita in the street, or to enter unbidden her home?'

- 'What right have I, indeed!' said her companion. 'Permit me to say, that when a man has risked life and limb in a fair lady's cause, he is entitled, at least, to receive her thanks. You gave me scant opportunity before to listen to the expressions of your gratitude, and I am come now to accept with proper modesty any eulogiums you may be pleased to bestow upon me.'
  - 'Thanks are not necessary when the obligation has been repaid.'

'Repaid!' said Clifford, in astonishment. 'Do you call it repayment to have me locked up for four-and-twenty hours, pulled off

my mule, and robbed of my property?'

- 'Assuredly. If the gentleman with whom I formed acquaintance at Irun had made his appearance at the gate of Madrid, he would, notwithstanding his majo dress, and his melodious fashion of giving forth his favourite song of Yo qui soy contrabandista, have been arrested, his papers taken from the curiously-devised secret pocket of his doublet, and Colonel Clifford would have been to-day in the tower of Segovia.'
- 'Colonel Clifford!' said her companion, in a tone of unutterable astonishment.
- 'Of course. Does a colonel in his Britannic Majesty's life-guards,' said the girl, with a mocking eye, 'suppose that he is an unknown personage? His modesty does him injustice.'

'You mistake me, lady, I am but a simple contrabandista.'

'One who adopts the dress of an hidalgo at intervals, in the happy

belief that the plumed hat and velvet doublet will enable him to win ladies' hearts, and who gains nothing by the magnificence of his costume but the frightening of two poor women into fits. If Colonel Clifford acts his part no more successfully than he dresses it, he will not gain much renown as an envoy to Elizabeth Farnese.'

The astonishment felt by the young Englishman at the intimate acquaintance exhibited of his wishes and his objects, was so great that he was unable to articulate a syllable, and he stood gazing at his companion for some time with an air that amply testified his

stupefaction.

'Madam,' said he, at length, 'you speak of things that are beyond

me. I understand you not.'

'Diplomatic to the last,' said the girl, with a laugh, 'but it is unnecessary; you have nothing to fear. There are more people in Castile, besides the envoy of the king of England, who are plotting the ruin of Alberoni.'

Clifford still looked as if he scarcely understood her language.

'Pshaw,' said she. 'Why affect mystery with me? How know you, but that with all your claims to dignity of sex, and valour and diplomacy, you are nought but a puppet. One of those who but act when a master spirit pulls the string?'

'And who is the master spirit?' 'Would you be astonished if

it were I?'

'You!' and the young envoy, in his hurry to give articulation to the first feeling that presented itself, intimated, distinctly enough, that he thought the vocation too lofty and difficult for the party

who appeared to claim it.

'Upon my word, senor,' said the lady, with something like pique in her voice, 'you are hardly polite in your intonations. Why should I not be the master spirit? Is it because I am a woman? To one who has lived so lately in France, it need not have been matter of astonishment that our sex should rule a kingdom. Why, it is not six months since the Duchess of Maine nearly overturned the government of that most clear-sighted and most puissant prince the regent Duke of Orleans.'

'Very true, fair lady. She tried, but you forgot to add, she failed.'

'But how many have succeeded? It is success, and not failure, that is the rule. On the other side of the Pyrenees, what ministers have ever exercised the power of Catharine or Mary de Medicis, of the Duchess of Montpensier or the Duchess of Longueville, or last and greatest, of Madame de Maintenon?'

'Ay, but that is in France, where women take a more prominent place in society. Your Spanish dames live so retired that they do

not possess a similar authority.'

'Wrong again—always wrong,' said his companion, laughing. 'If you knew anything of female influence you would know that it is always most powerful when least prominent. To a despotism openly exercised, you men can make opposition. You can offer none to one which does not exhibit itself, and is unknown and unsuspected.

Who ruled Spain in Philip II.'s time?—The Princess of Eboli. In Philip IV.'s time?—The Countess of Olivarez. In Charles II.'s time?—Elizabeth of Austria. And who, in the reign of our present most exemplary and wife-loving sovereign, Philip V., but his first spouse, Maria Louisa, the Savoyard, and his second our little gracious but most energetic mistress, Elizabeth Farnese, the Parmesan?'

'I give in at once,' said Clifford, in an apologetic attitude, and covering his face with both hands. 'I resign all pretensions to superiority. I had no conception they had given me, as a companion, an historical dictionary in saya and mantilla. I am only astonished,' continued he, in a meaning tone, 'that one whose memory of female domination is so accurate, should have omitted the Princess of Ursins. Is it that Mademoiselle de Chalais chanced to be ignorant of her name?'

'Pooh, pooh!' said his companion, laughing affectedly, as if to cover her embarrassment; 'I have not of course told you all. What I did say was merely to give you a small sample of my knowledge. I could, if I chose, astonish you.'

'I defy you to be more successful in that way than you have been.'

'Don't be too sure,' said she; and she held up her finger admonishingly.

'Nay, you alarm me not, I repeat the defiance.'

'And I accept it. Do you remember, senor contrabandista,' continued she, 'the interview, which about a week before you left Paris, you had with Lord Stanhope and Dubois?'

Clifford started and looked at her in dismay.

'Pshaw!' said the girl, laughing at the astonishment expressed in his face. 'That is nothing. Do you, more especially, recollect that eventful evening on which you were conducted by the Cardinal to a certain house in a certain street, and to a room in which there was a screen, over which was thrown, alternately, a white handkerchief and a black one. Ha, ha, ha! How well Colonel Clifford went through his drill. No recruit only a week caught could have laboured more zealously. "Rise up"—"sit down"—"take your hat off"—"put your hat on"—but most of all, do you remember the instructions of Lord Stanhope that you should follow, implicitly, any intimation of his will, especially when it was couched in terms like these,' and the young girl drew from the bosom of her dress the mysterious scrawl, which had been produced by Perez at the Moorish tower, and which contained, as before, the words—

'To C. C. Obey the orders of the bearer. Stanhope.'

'She must be a fairy,' muttered the young soldier to himself.

'Of course I am. It is the only rational sentence I have heard you utter. And now, sir cavalier, show your obedience to the mandate of your chief, and begone.'

'And can you be so cruel as to ask it? To you, who know so much, it would be affectation to conceal my mission or my purpose here. I came into this country merely as a diplomatic agent, and

with no other wish than the ruin of the Cardinal. But you know—you must know that other feelings have since sprung up to which I attach greater importance than the success of my diplomacy. Ah! Donna Teresa! I remember the Somo Sierra and the inn at Buitrago. Have you forgotten them? The girl appeared embarrassed.

'This is no time,' said she, at length, 'to discuss such follies.

Now you must be gone. There is danger here.'

'I care not,' said Clifford, 'I will not move till you tell me who you are. Till you give me some hope that I shall see you under

happier auspices.'

It may not be, Colonel Clifford. I am the granddaughter of one of Spain's proudest nobles—one who would never wed his child to an Englishman, and it were idle to permit hopes, the fruition of which is impossible. But,' continued she, hurriedly, as a sound of closing doors came upon her ear, 'for the love of the Virgin, be gone! Your life is forfeited if you are found here.'

'Had I a thousand lives dependent on the risk, I would peril them all, rather than leave this without a pledge that I should see you

again.'

'Oh, no, no!' said his agitated companion. 'It were madness. For you—for me—it would alike be madness to cherish hopes that could never be realised. But fly,' said she, as the sound of distant voices came upon her ear. 'For heaven's sake, fly, unless you would kill me by seeing you butchered before my eyes.'

'I care not,' said the young soldier, in the accents of resolute despair. 'Again, I tell you, I care not. I will not move from hence till you give me hope—till you pledge yourself to see me again.'

And he fell upon his knees with the air of one whom fate had

chained to the spot.

'Holy Virgin,' said the girl, clasping her hands to her temples in the attitude of terror. 'They are coming, and will murder him. Fly, for it is yet time. I entreat—I beseech you—fly.'

'Not one step,' said Clifford, 'were this spot destined to be my grave. I will not stir one step till you give me a solemn pledge to

see me again.'

'Oh, I will—I will,' said the terrified girl, extending to him her

hand. 'Only go.'

'You do not deceive me?' 'By our Lady of Antiocha—by the Holy Virgin of Pilar—I speak the truth. And now if you would not

see me die at your fect, once more, for it is yet time, fly.'

He pressed her hands to his lips. They were abandoned to him, unresistingly. He sprung to his feet and passed his arm around her. His mouth, for an instant, met hers. It may be that the girl was too terrified to offer opposition, for she seemed scarcely conscious of the act, and only once more articulated in trembling accents, 'For the love of heaven, begone.'

He hurried to the door, and partially raised the hangings that covered it, but he instantly dropped them again, as he caught a

glimpse of a group of figures at the far end of the hall.

'It is too late,' said he, as he laid his hand upon his sword; 'I

must sell my life as dearly as I may.'
'Holy Mother, no,' said the girl. 'Would you shed the blood of my kindred? But, ah! a thought strikes me. There is still a chance for safety.'

She seized his wrist as she spoke, and hurried him to the side of the room. In an instant she had raised the tapestry which covered

its walls, and placed him behind it.

'Stir not,' whispered she. 'Breathe not. When they are gone,

I will release you.

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the hangings which covered the door were pushed aside, and eight or ten men entered the apartment.

# CHAPTER XXII.

#### THE CONSPIRATORS.

THE party which entered the room was conducted by a man of about seventy. He was short and stout made, but seemed to feel the advance of years, for he supported himself by a staff which rose nearly as high as his shoulder, and which on its upper end was superbly ornamented with gold and jewels. His dress was in the old Spanish fashion, and of blue velvet. On his head was a broadbrimmed plumed hat. Round his neck he wore the order of the Golden Fleece, and a large and massive gold key was suspended from his girdle.

The men who followed him were apparently of high rank. The richness of their dress, the orders upon their breasts, and more than all, a certain air of quiet haughtiness which bespoke their being accustomed each to be the head of his own circle, and the observed of

all observers, marked them out as grandees of Spain.

The young girl was still standing on the spot where Clifford had

left her, and agonized with terror.

'What do you here, my child?' said the old man who was the leader of the party. 'I have been in the garden, my dear grandfather,' was the scarcely articulated reply, 'and am just returned.'

"Tis well. But now begone, my child. We would be alone. Excellencies,' continued he, addressing his companions. 'My granddaughter, Donna Teresa Pacheco.'

The nobles who accompanied him unbonnetted, and by a profound obeisance acknowledged the presence of the heiress of their host.

The courtesy was replied to by one equally low on the part of

Donna Teresa, and the young lady left the room.

No sooner was she gone than the master of the mansion approached the table in the centre of the apartment which had supported his trembling grandchild. It had obviously been prepared for the reception of guests, as it was covered with a large Turkey carpet, and upon either side were arranged velvet-draped, heavy, highbacked chairs. At the upper end was placed one with arms, and of a larger size than the others, apparently intended for the president of the meeting. Towards this the old man who had first entered the apartment led the way, after he had carefully bolted the door, and cast a sharp, quick glance around, as if to assure himself that the chamber was untenanted, except by those who were intended to be its occupants.

'Don Louis De Haro,' said he to one of those who had followed him, and who was decorated with the order of the Holy Ghost. 'There is your place. In a meeting so important as this, no one is better able to guide our councils than the heir of the house of Carpio.'

'No, Duke of Escalona,' said the young man, ,I am unworthy of the honour. You, and you only, are entitled to preside over this meeting. Your age, your high rank, your experience in the affairs of government, and most of all, the noble opposition you have made to this Italian mountebank who rules over us, all point you out as the person best entitled to act as our leader, and best qualified to discharge his duties.'

A low hum of applause from the surrounding nobles marked their approval of the words of their companion, and the duke accordingly moved to the head of the table. He did not, however, immediately sit down, but remained standing till each of his fellow nobles had assumed his place in front of the chair which he had selected. The old man then raised with great dignity his broad-brimmed plumed hat, and bowed gravely right and left to his companions. The salute was immediately acknowledged. Each head was uncovered, and with a formal salutation the parties upon either hand bent low in reply to the courtesy.

'Grandees of Spain,' said the president, 'be covered. It is a privilege that you are entitled to before your sovereign, and it is one that I wish you to exercise now. We are met to-day for no interchange of the courtesies of private life, and it is fit that in discussing public affairs, we should follow in all respects the same strict etiquette which we should take as the rule of our conduct in the

king's council chamber. Grandees of Spain, be seated.'

With the words the animated statues sank into their places, and their venerable chief once more addressed them.

'Nobles of Spain,' continued he, 'you know why we are met here. It is now scarce nineteen years since we saw expire in this city the last descendant of the great emperor, the representative of a race that made Spain the first kingdom upon earth, the glory of her own children, and the envy of surrounding nations. To fill the vacant place upon her throne, we selected the grandson of the Infanta Donna Maria Teresa, the daughter of King Philip IV., of blessed memory. I mean our present sovereign, Don Philip. I say we selected him, for though there was a will of Charles II. in his favour, it was only the attachment of the nobles of Spain which enabled him to hold his ground against the English, and the Austrian competitor for his throne. To us, therefore, Don Philip owes his crown—to

us, his equals, for all of us are as noble as the king, or more so. He is bound, therefore, in gratitude, to advance the interests of the monarchy, and most of all to respect the privileges of the grandees. Has he done so?'

'He has violated them a thousand times,' was the unanimous

reply.

'Ay, and that in matters of the last importance,' said the Count of Lemos. 'He has permitted Tellez Zerclas, the captain of the Walloon Guard, to sit in his presence at chapel, an honour which belongs of right only to the grandees. And were not I and the Duke of Sessa compelled by disgust to resign, he, the captaincy of the Spanish Guard, and I, that of the Halberdiers, in order that we might not be degraded to the level of the low-born Fleming?'

'He has allowed,' said the Count of Altamira, 'the Controller of the Finances to have traces to the leading mules of his carriage six yards long, a thing hitherto unknown, except in equipages of car-

dinals, ambassadors, and nobles of the first class.'

'Worse—worse,' said the Duke of Medina del Rio Seco; 'he had the insolence to tell me—me who am Hereditary Admiral of Castile, and whose forefathers have been its admirals ever since my royal ancestor Henry III., conceded the office to the house of Henriquez—that I was unfit to take command of the fleet, because I had never been at sea.'

'Worst of all,' said the Duke of Medina Sidonia, 'he makes our rank dependent upon a dress. He has, as you well know, introduced the French costume. What is more intolerable still is, that he insists upon its being worn at court ceremonials. I detest this French dress. I will never degrade myself by it; yet what is the price that I am paying for my patriotism? You know that no grandee can claim the privilege of his rank, till he has worn his hat before the king, and yet, because I refused to adopt this new foreign fashion, he would not permit me to perform the ceremonial; and thus I, Don Domenico de Guzman, Commander of the order of Calatrava, Gentleman of the Chamber, Viceroy of Catalonia, Governor of the Palace of the Buen Retiro, and Grand Equerry to the King—I, whose forefathers won Andalusia from the Moor—am denied the dearest prerogative of my rank, because I would not disguise myself in a French periwig and a three-cornered hat!'

This moving catalogue of sorrows seemed gradually to have worked upon the feelings of the audience. It became more and more excited, till at length, as the Duke of Medina Sidonia brought his complaint to a close, there was a general murmur of Muera el

Rey—Death to the Tyrant.

The aged president seemed to listen to the noisy exclamations of his companions with impatience, and if one might judge from the expression of his countenance, with a slight feeling of contempt. It was with a tone, however, of the most respectful and zealous sympathy that he again addressed them.

'Nobles of Spain,' said he, 'the acts you have enumerated are no

doubt those of gross oppression, but yet they refer to us alone. There are matters which affect not merely our interests, but those of the nation, and to these I would now wish to address your attention. You are aware we have been involved in a war with all Europe. We have had against us France, and Austria, and England, and Sardinia, and the Dutch. Our troops have been slaughtered, our fleets destroyed, and within the last three months even a hostile army has been seen within our confines, and all this to gratify the ambition of a low Italian adventurer.'

A general concert of voices pronounced the name of Alberoni.

'Yes, Hidalgos, he is the man. We must get rid of him. He is not only an enemy to us, but to our sovereign. He keeps Don Philip a prisoner within the walls of the palace, and when but two days back I, in virtue of my office of grand chamberlain, would have approached the king for the purpose of informing him of the discontent of the nobles, the peasant churl dared to lay hands upon me, Don John Pacheco, a knight of the Golden Fleece, and who had been successively viceroy of Navarre, and Arragon, and Catalonia, and Sicily, and Naples. By my honour, as a noble gentleman, I paid him for his insolence. But that he was a priest I should have struck the low-born hound with my dagger.'

'Yes, his insolence is intolerable. He must be got rid of,' said the Count of Lemos, who seemed to act as the spokesman of his

companions.

'Upon that point at least,' replied the Duke of Escalona, 'we are all agreed. The only doubt is with regard to the best mode of

carrying the idea into effect.'

'And yet,' rejoined the count, 'it seems to me most simple. In the old times, Alphonso the Chaste, King of Arragon, had a minion for his minister. Again and again, like Don Philip, had he been warned of the evil qualities of his favourite, and again and again he set their remonstrances at defiance. What then did my ancestor and the other Arragonese nobles? When they put the crown upon his head, they said to him, "You who are no better than us we make our king. So long as you rule justly we will obey you, but if not—not." These were no empty words. They acted as they had spoken. They seized upon their childlike monarch and his parasite, and in an hour after, the headsman had done his work, and the citizens of Saragossa saw a 'head rolling on the scaffold. Why should not Philip and his insolent priest be treated after a similar fashion?'

The violent counsel seemed to meet the sympathies of the assembled nobles, for it was received with acclamation. Escalona

alone listened to it coldly and in silence.

'No, your excellencies,' said he, when the applauding murmurs had subsided, 'much as I admire the chivalrous boldness of the Count of Lemos and his straightforward policy, I must oppose it, for it would be unsuccessful. In the old wild times he alludes to, the conduct of the grandees was such as the emergency required. It

would not now be attended with the same auspicious results. There has sprung up of late years such a devotion to the royal person, that it would be vain to hope that the nation would countenance any attempt against it. When such has been made it has invariably failed. I will not go back so far as the time of the great emperor and the unfortunate revolt of the Padillas, I will confine myself to the present reign. Fourteen years ago the Count of Leganez attempted to overturn the government of our present sovereign. It was in vain. Nay, last year, three of the most powerful nobles of the kingdom, the Dukes of Veraguas and Las Torres, and the Marquis of Aguilar, again made an effort to seize upon the person of the king, for the purpose of deposing him and putting the Prince of Asturies on the throne. But they were, like their predecessors, unsuccessful; and why? Because the public voice would give no sanction to the violence. No; if we would cope with the Italian we must cope with him after a more pacific manner than that which the Count of Lemos has recommended. We must make his dismissal the act of the king himself.

'And how,' said, in an excited tone, Don Louis de Haro, 'is such a feat to be accomplished? Philip, as you yourself said, and correctly, is kept a prisoner in the palace, and if we are not to employ open force, as Don Salvador de Castro has recommended, by what other means are we to approach him, so as to make even an appeal to his

justice?

'It is precisely to that point,' said the Duke of Escalona, in a calm tone, 'that I now address myself. I need hardly say, your excellencies, that the subject which is now before us, has deeply occupied my mind, and I have long since been satisfied that the only way of getting rid of the obnoxious favourite is by having as our ally some one who enjoys confidential intercourse with his Majesty, and who is able to state to him the just grievances of his subjects, and depict in its proper colours the bitter hatred with which they view the supremacy of the Italian.'

'And where,' said the Count of Lemos, 'will you find among the grandees such a person, when the king himself is so secluded that even you, the most distinguished ornament of his court, and who, besides, have the right of entry in virtue of your office of grand

chamberlain, were not permitted to approach him?'

'I have thought over the grandees,' said the Duke of Escalona, with a smile, 'and I confess I can find none likely to be fortunate enough to obtain the privilege.'

'Your excellency confesses, then, that your scheme too is a failure.'

'By no means.'

'You speak in riddles, Duke of Escalona,' said Don Louis de Haro, with something of irritation, 'and they are beyond our expounding. So we must wait with patience till he who has framed the labyrinth, should furnish us with a clue to its mazes.'

'I am about to do so now,' said the aged president, with a good-humoured smile, 'and I trust, to prove to you that I have not

spoken lightly. Yet the mystery was no deep one. If Philip V. has carefully avoided associating with the grandees, are there none whose companionship he clings to?"

'Yes,' shouted a chorus of voices—' a woman or a priest.'

'Precisely; and therefore it is, that by a woman or a priest we must destroy the supremacy of Alberoni.'

'It cannot be a woman,' said Don Louis de Haro, 'for the queen will allow none to address him but herself, and we look in vain for her aid, for it is notorious that she, a princess of Parma, gives her whole support to the peasant priest, who shares with her the honour of an Italian birthplace.'

'Don Louis de Haro is right,' said the duke, 'and there is no woman within the palace at the present hour, save Elizabeth Farnese, who can rule the king's mind. Yet there is one beyond it. All of you remember well Anne de la Tremouille, the Camarera Mayor to the late queen. You know how, for twelve long years, she ruled with success this kingdom, and how, again and again, when the English troops and the Austrians were in possession of Madrid, and three-fourths of our provinces, she supported the drooping courage of the king, forced him, even against his will, to continue the contest, and gave him almost unwillingly the throne. You know, too, by what gross treachery Alberoni had her expelled the kingdom. Well, your excellencies, I had it from a sure source that her influence over the mind of Philip, were she present to exercise it, would be now as great as ever. Upon this knowledge I acted; and about a year since, I sent to her in France, a member of my family to endeavour to induce her to return to Madrid and resume her old supremacy.

'And what,' cried a dozen anxious voices, 'was the reply?'

'Alas! the mission failed. Five tedious years of sorrow have destroyed her energies. She gave, I need hardly say, her best wishes for our success, and her aid in our favour at the court of France, but she declined to support our views in the only efficient manner in which they could be supported, by herself returning to Madrid.'

'Your plans too, then,' said the Count of Lemos, 'have failed.'

'Not altogether,' said the duke. 'They have failed with the woman, but the noble count will recollect that I had two strings to my bow. I have succeeded with the priest.'

'And he is—' 'D'Aubenton.'

'The father confessor?' 'Even so. You are aware that Alberoni promised the Jesuit a Cardinal's hat, and, like a true Italian, broke his word. It was whispered to me, that there existed under the black robe, feelings towards the minister which were not those of charity. Upon this hint I spoke.'

'And what was the result of the conference?' 'Short, but decisive. The Jesuit has promised to obtain the dismissal of the Cardinal, and the restoration of the grandees to office, and I on our part gave him a solemn pledge that we should obtain for him from his Holiness the wished-for purple.'

'And when,' said Don Louis de Haro, 'are we to witness this most auspicious event?' 'In a few days, or it may be in a few hours.'

'We must be active, then,' said the Count of Lemos.

'On the contrary,' said the Duke of Escalona, 'I must request of the noble count and of your excellencies to do nothing. The Cardinal is suspicious. He is lavish of wealth, and is well served. His spies are everywhere, and should he obtain the slightest hint of what is at present contemplated, the result might be, not the dismissal of the minister, but that of the father confessor, and with it I will not say danger to ourselves, for I will not degrade Castilian nobles by supposing that they shrink from facing the peril, but what is far worse, the continued supremacy in Spain of a low-born minister, foreign alike in his habits, his language, and his objects, to the Spanish nation.'

'Heaven grant,' said the Count of Lemos, 'that the plan which your excellency has devised may be successful; and yet, I say it without offence, it appears to me but little honourable to the grandees of Spain to be indebted for their freedom from tyranny not to their own swords, but to the juggling of a foreign shaveling.'

'Content you in that, my young colleague,' said the duke, with a smile. 'If the juggling of the foreign shaveling be successful, the swords of the grandees will lose none of their efficacy from it, for one of the first acts of the new government will be to restore the Count of Lemos to his old command of the body-guard.'

'I would ask,' said the young noble, 'no better fortune.'

'It may be, too,' said the duke, 'that the first exercise of your

restored office will be to arrest our old enemy the Cardinal.'

'Nay, as for that,' said the count, laughing, 'if I once saw him on his way to Segovia, I could almost find it in my heart to forgive Zerclas and his Walloons having the luck of the job. Though that would be a hard matter too; for every Sunday I feel my bile rise as if it would choke me when I see the rogue of a Fleming, scarce sober from his Saturday night's debauch, squat himself down upon the bench in the royal chapel with as cool indifference as if he had been accustomed all his life to sit in a king's presence, like a grandee of Spain.'

'And now, my friends,' said the duke, once more resuming his address, 'I will, for the present, bid you farewell. I scarce need tell you to be silent. Do more. Hold no conferences, interchange no greetings, and regulate even the expression of your features, for the adversary with whom you have to contend has a thousand ears, and, as my worthy little priest Don Jerome used to phrase it, "a bird of the air may carry the matter."

The old man left his seat as he spoke, and raising his hat, bent gravely right and left to his companions. They returned the salute, and with formal courtesy. The plumed broad-brimmed sombreros were then once more replaced, and each in his turn bowing profoundly, left the room. One only, the Count of Saldagna, remained;

but he, when the master of the house was about to follow the example of his guests, laid his hand upon the arm of the aged noble, and the duke, in obedience to the signal, resumed his seat.

# CHAPTER XXIII.

#### THE MAN BEHIND THE ARRAS.

WE must return to our friend Clifford. It is difficult to paint his feelings during the conference the details of which we have just chronicled. It may be recollected that he had taken refuge behind the hangings of the tapestry; and as the assembled nobles entertained no suspicion of any one being in their neighbourhood, and spoke in their usual tone as a matter of course, the envoy of Lord Stanhope heard every word that was uttered.

It can be easily imagined how great was his surprise when he learned that his unwelcome visitors had met together for the express purpose of endeavouring to carry into effect the very object for which he himself had been sent into Spain—the fall of Alberoni.

His first impulse was to have emerged from his hiding-place, and asked a share in councils which coincided so precisely with his mission. But this line of conduct was abandoned upon reflection. His instructions were marked 'private and confidential.' He was allowed to place himself in communication only with the ambassador of Parma, the father confessor, and the queen. His chances of success with one and all depended upon the secrecy observed in approaching them, and that would be endangered by communicating his plans to the conspirators. True, they were nobles of Spain, and, as he believed, honourable men; but still they were numerous; and if in a multitude of councillors there is safety, in a multitude of secret-keepers there is peril at least for the secret. He determined, therefore, to keep his place of concealment.

There was yet another reason for this. He might possibly compromise his fair companion by his appearance. How was he to account for it? How could he excuse his having found his way into another man's house, or give any satisfactory reasons for having concealed himself in one of its private apartments? He had no

choice, then, but to remain where he was.

Nevertheless, it may well be supposed with what intense eagerness he listened to the speakers. And yet the subject that fascinated him was neither the discontent of the Spanish nobles with the supremacy of Alberoni, nor the promised support of the father confessor, both so favourable to his success. What interested him the most was the remark that fell from the lips of the Duke of Escalona, that he had sent a member of his family to France to communicate with the Princess of Ursins; and that that lady, though she refused to return to Spain, had, nevertheless, used all her influence at the French court to support the plans of the conspirators. Was Donna Teresa the member of his family spoken of

by the duke? Was the Princess of Ursins the lady behind the screen for whose approval he had been submitted by the Cardinal Dubois?

Such were the speculations that employed the mind of the young envoy, and mixed themselves up with the details of the plans which, from time to time, fell from the conspirators. At length the conference approached its close, and it was with eager ear and throbbing heart that Clifford heard the departure of its members.

'Now,' said he to himself as he listened to each footstep, 'in a few minutes I shall be free, and I have at least gained something by my morning's work. I knew before of D'Aubenton's ill-treatment by Alberoni. I know now something more. The Jesuit seems to be born under a lucky star, for the grandees have promised him a Cardinal's hat, and I hold for him a similar promise from the Duke of Orleans. It would be strange if the fellow after all missed his red stockings. But now the hall must be cleared. In another minute I shall be free.'

His hopes were doomed to be disappointed. It will be recollected that when Escalona was about to leave the room, a relative of his, the Count of Saldagna, gently laid his hand upon his arm, and detained him in the chamber.

'Well, Silva,' said the old duke, with a laugh, 'what would you? Your communication, I suppose, is no treason, and we can discuss it in a more comfortable apartment than this.'

His companion replied by holding up his finger, as if to warn him

of some danger.

'Pacheco,' said he, 'I fear we have had more ears to listen to us than we counted on. Twice or thrice during our conference it occurred to me that I saw the tapestry move opposite where I am sitting.'

'Ha!' said the duke, as he laid his hand upon his sword, 'that is

a matter I will soon set to rights.'

'Not a foot,' said the Count of Saldagna, and he grasped firmly the arm of his companion. 'You do not stir a foot. If the fellow be a master of his weapon, he may chance to escape, and put half the grandees of Spain at the mercy of Alberoni. We must play a

surer game.'

'But how? To summon the servants would be but to betray ourselves, for the first act of the eavesdropper would be to proclaim to the menials the secrets of the conference he had listened to, and demand to be taken before the Cardinal. And to you, Silva, as a relative, I may say, though I blush to utter it, such is the power of the gold of the wily Italian, that even in his own house Don John Pacheco is not secure of the fidelity of his own domestics. We must, I repeat, do the work ourselves. It is the only guarantee for secrecy.'

There was silence for about a minute. It was broken by the

Count of Saldagna.

'It is too great a risk,' said he, 'Ha! now I think of it I have a plan which will settle the matter at once. Do you recollect, Don

John, when you were viceroy of Naples, that a galley of the knights of Malta came into port, having on board three beautiful Circassian women, whom they had taken at sea in a Turkish brigantine? The Grand Signor had intended the girls for a present to the bey of Tunis, and they had been captured ere they reached their destination. You redeemed them, and sent them to the Turk. Do you remember what the Osmanli gave you in return?"

'Well,' said Escalona, 'two black slaves, with the sinews and ferocity of bulls, whom he used to employ as his private executioners, and whose silence he had insured by cutting their tongues out. By St. Isidro, they are the very men for our purpose. Wait here, and I will fetch them. And talk as to yourself, and aloud. I should be sorry that the stag broke cover ere we had the hounds

ready to lay at his flanks.'

With the words the old noble left the room, and his companion, in accordance to his instructions, began to pace backwards and forwards, speaking at intervals, and in a sufficiently loud tone to

make his presence known to the prisoner behind the arras.

That prisoner was in no comfortable state of feeling. He had not, to be sure, heard what had passed between the two old nobles, because the Count of Saldagna had intentionally pitched his voice at so low a note that it was impossible to catch what was said. But though the words were inaudible, the general intonation of the voices came upon the ear, and their whispering tone, the caution used in the communication, and the lingering in the apartment of the master of the house after his guests had departed, all suggested to Clifford that his presence had been discovered or suspected. What was to be done was the question. His first resolve was to rush out and force his way to the street. But this could not be effected without violence, probably not without bloodshed. What was worst of all was, his opponent was likely to be the old man, who was apparently the master of the house, and whom Therese had addressed as her Any injury to him would, of course, mar the success of his suit, and escape on such conditions possessed no charms. Confused and hesitating, the young soldier knew not what to do; and, ere he had formed a decision, the Duke of Escalona returned.

The old man was accompanied by two gigantic blacks. They were in the prime of life, and their appearance seemed to justify the confidence placed in them by their Turkish master, for their thews and muscles evidenced immense strength, while the ill-repressed fierceness of their dark eye, marked them out as the nature-born ministers of crime. They were dressed in turbans of crimson silk, and wore caftans or loose robes of cloth of the same colour, embroidered on the edge with gold lace. The garments came scarcely below the knee, and had their large sleeves looped up as high as the shoulder. A shawl confined them at the waist. There were sandals upon their feet, gold pendants in their ears, and a thick ring of the same metal round their necks; but beyond that, dress they had none, for the legs and arms were bare. Each carried a short-handled

bright axe, with a large curved edge, in his right hand, and a small

coil of rope in his left.

As soon as the duke had entered he bolted the door. 'Now, Saldagna,' said he, 'we are ready for the game.' With the words he drew his sword, and, intimating to the blacks by a motion of his finger that they should remain near the entrance of the room, he commenced with his companion his scrutiny.

It is difficult to paint the feelings of Clifford, as he heard the two nobles raising the tapestry along the wall, and became conscious of their gradual approach by the rustling of that portion of it which enveloped him, and which, disturbed by the stirring of the distant hangings, began to move and tremble, as if in sympathy with him it covered. At length the motions of the arras became more and more decided; it was raised, and Clifford and the master of the

mansion stood face to face.

The young man made no movement. He had long decided on his line of conduct, and now, with his arms folded on his breast, he stood before his captors, and, with a calm, self-possessed eye, awaited their acts.

It is probable that if he had shown any sign, either of violence or timidity, the two nobles would have proceeded at once to extremities; but there was something in the lofty bearing and dauntless courage of their prisoner which awakened their respect; for, after looking at him some time in silence, the Duke of Escalona raised his hat gravely, but with courtesy, and said—

'Senor caballero, we would have conference with you.'

He turned as he spoke, and once more resumed his place under the canopy, and, motioning to the Count of Saldagna to take the chair near him, he beckoned to Clifford to approach.

The young soldier obeyed.

'Now, senor caballero,' said the old noble, 'this is my house. I have not the honour of your acquaintance. Will you have the kindness to inform me to what I am indebted for your presence in it?'

There was no answer.

'It is as I suspected,' continued the duke. 'You give no reason. Will you allow me to supply the deficiency, and answer for you? You came hither to spy out the acts of honourable men.'

There was still no reply. The old noble seemed to become irritated. 'Traitor,' said he, 'do you deny this? But you will do so, for you

fear for your miserable life!'

The young envoy flushed. The charge of cowardice seemed to have shaken his resolution of silence, for he said, 'I do deny it: but, your excellency will pardon me for adding, if, indeed, it be to the Duke of Escalona I have now the honour of addressing myself, not for the reason you have assigned for it.'

'For what reason, then?' said the duke, sarcastically. 'Will you do me the favour of communicating it to the Count of Saldagna and to myself?' 'Simply that it is not my habit to play the part of

an eavesdropper!'

'Do you pretend, then, to allege,' said his irritated host, 'that there have not been several parties lately in this room, and that they held conference on matters not intended for your ear?'

'I am aware of both the facts intimated by your excellency.'

'You will probably, however,' said the duke, with a bitter smile, 'soften the confession by informing us that you caught little of what they said.' 'On the contrary. I heard every word.'

'Indeed,' said the duke. 'And will you favour us with the object of the conference?' 'The dismissal of Alberoni, by the aid of the

father confessor.

The two nobles looked at each other for a moment, as if uncertain how to act.

'The plot you speak of,' said the count of Saldagna, 'was a dangerous one. Who are the men that were bold enough to undertake to execute it?' 'The grandees of Spain,' replied the young envoy.

'Will you favour us with the names of the conspirators?'

'That is beyond my power, but I can give you the names of some of those who were present.' 'And they were—'

'The Count of Lemos, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, and Don

Louis de Haro.'

'By the Virgin,' said the aged master of the house, addressing the Count of Saldagna, 'whatever be the faults of our new friend, want of frankness is not of the number. And what,' continued he, turning to the prisoner, and assuming a stern look, 'do you expect will be the fate of him who has thrust himself upon the secrets of a plot, so momentous to the safety of those engaged in it?'

Clifford made no answer.

'Do you hear me, senor caballero?' said the duke. 'What, I say,

do you expect will be your fate?"

Still the young envoy was silent. And again the question was repeated, and in a louder tone. Clifford mused deeply. He spoke

at length—

'Duke of Escalona,' said he, 'you ask me what I expect will be my fate. I answer that it will depend less upon my own act than upon the feelings of my judges. If I had fallen into the hands of a mere plotter I should have foretold it at once. Such men listen only to their suspicions. They would have held me merely as a spy, and they would have paid me with a spy's wages—the headsman and the block.'

'And why,' said the duke, in a tone of surprise, 'should not I treat you thus?' 'Because Don John Pacheco is no mere plotter. He is recognized in Spain as the model of every knightly virtue; and honourable himself, he is little disposed to doubt the honour of others.'

The great noble, old as he was, flushed with pleasure at the compliment. The feeling, however, was but momentary, and in even a colder tone than usual, he resumed—

'And if,' said he, 'a man had this high-minded confidence in another's honour, what would be his conduct?'

'He would accept,' said Clifford, 'the pledge of his prisoner that

he knew nothing of any intention to frame the plot he had listened to; and that having heard it involuntarily, he would keep it secret as the grave, and having received such pledge, would let his prisoner go.'

'The counsel,' said the old man, in a sarcastic tone, 'is worthy of the Cid, but to be acted on with safety, it must be exercised in favour

of an honourable man—' 'I am such.'

'And of high lineage—' 'My race, Don John Pacheco, is as noble as your own.'

'And a man with a name—' Clifford was silent.

'Ha!' said the Count of Saldagna; 'has this far-descended chivalrous gentleman no designation? But I scarce expected it, for I am indifferently well acquainted with the appearance of our hidalgos, and I never saw any in the Gallery of Pictures who resembled the caballero. Perhaps,' he continued, in a taunting accent, 'he was there, as here, concealed behind the arras.'

'Count of Saldagna,' said Clifford, haughtily, 'it is scarce worthy the blood of Silva to insult a prisoner. But I repeat what I stated, that if I am permitted to go hence unharmed, I pledge you my word as a cavalier that I never will reveal to mortal ear the secrets of this meeting. I repeat that I was present at it involuntarily, and I further add, that I pledge you my word that when I entered this chamber I had not the most distant idea of the scene of which I was

about to be the witness.'

'Indeed!' said the Duke of Escalona, sarcastically. 'And wherefore, then, came you hither? Ha!' continued he, 'a light breaks in upon me. There may be another cause, and a blacker one, to explain your presence. Silva,' continued he, in an agitated voice, 'my grand-daughter was in the apartment when we entered. This may be a matter a thousand times worse than the discovery of a conspiracy. Speak, traitor!' and he turned towards Clifford with a face convulsed with passion. 'Speak, I say; though I degrade my house by giving even utterance to such a thought. Came you hither to see Donna Teresa Pacheco?' Clifford was silent.

'You speak not,' continued the old noble, trembling with excitement. 'You dare not speak. Yet I must have an answer, if I tear it from your heart. Reply then, at once, or I put you to death where you stand.' And the old man drew his sword, and hurried

towards his captive.

The Count of Saldagna threw himself upon his arm, and arrested his steps.

'Are you mad, Pacheco?' said he. 'Know you what you do?'

'Well, well. I would avenge the honour of my house. Unhand me, Silva,' continued he. 'By heavens, I shall hold even you as my comparity you attempt to have a superior and a council.

enemy if you attempt to bar my vengeance in such a cause.'

'Yes, Count of Saldagna,' said Clifford, 'leave the Duke of Escalona to strike his blow. I respect him for his anger, for I, like him, would strike dead any one who doubted the honour of Donna Teresa Pacheco,'

'Ha!' said the old noble, 'do you say this?' and he paused for a moment, as if in doubt and surprise, but in another minute suspicion returned. 'No,' continued he. 'You do not buy me, senor caballero, with fair words. But this is a matter of grave import, and I would treat it with the gravity that it decenves?'

treat it with the gravity that it deserves.

He sheathed his sword as he spoke, and resumed his seat under the canopy. 'And now, senor caballero,' continued he, in a solemn tone, 'listen to me, and with attention, for your life depends upon the answer. I am the master of this house, the head of a family which yields to none for rank, or power, or wealth, in this kingdom. Sons I have none, for the Count of Gormas and the Marquis of Moya are both dead, and my only descendant and my heir is the young girl whom I found in this chamber when I entered it. It would kill me were I to suppose that that girl's fair fame were not as unsullied as her race. Now, boy, hear me. Swear to me upon the holy cross that you have never spoken to that girl, that you have never addressed to her look, or sign, or letter, and you shall go hence free, after remaining some few days in honourable custody, so as to assure the safety of my colleagues, for a little time must prove the plot's failure or success.'

'And what,' said Clifford, 'if I refuse the oath, is the alternative?'
'Then,' said the old man, flushing crimson, and rising from his chair, as if to give additional effect to his words, 'as sure as there is a God in heaven, you shall die before you leave this room. And now, senor caballero, give me your oath!'

Clifford was silent. The old noble became agitated.

'Speak,' said he, in a trembling voice. 'Have respect, at least, to

gray hairs and a father's sorrow. Swear me the oath!'

'I repeat but what I said before,' said the young envoy, and his voice trembled; 'there is not an angel in heaven more pure than Donna Tercsa, and I myself would put any man to death who dared to whisper a word of slander against her.'

'The oath! the oath!' muttered the old man, in an agitated tone.

'I must have the oath!'

Clifford was again silent.

'Traitor! seducer! Do you refuse it?' 'I have replied already,

and I cannot add to or change my words.

'Again I ask you, and for the last time. Do you refuse the oath?' and the words were spoken in a cold tone, as if some coming

resolve had calmed his passion.

Clifford felt the influence of the voice, and understood it, but it did not change his resolution. For a moment, indeed, a slight shiver came over him, but the weakness, if it were one, vanished as rapidly as it came, for he drew himself up to his full height, folded his arms on his breast, and fixing his haughty eyes upon his host, said, in the accents of one who foresaw his fate, and was prepared to meet it,—

' Don John Pacheco, you have had your answer.'

The old man looked at him for awhile as if he had scarcely ex-

pected the resolve, but in another instant anger resumed its place, and the duke again spoke, but in a voice whose words fell each from

his lips as distinct as drops of water.

'Young man,' said he, 'you have kept your resolution, and I will abide by mine. Three hundred years ago, Don Alphonso Pacheco, Marquis of Villenas, for deeds of valour done against the Moors, received from King Henry, the fourth of the name, the power of doing justice in his own house upon his enemies and his vassals. That power still exists in the race of Pacheco, and I am about to exercise it now. On this day, and in this room, shall ye die.'

'Would you murder me like a dog?' said the young soldier,

agitated, even in spite of himself, at his approaching fate.

'Fear it not,' said the old man. 'Such a death suits neither my justice nor you. You say you are noble. As a noble shall be your doom. Do you see,' continued he, pointing to one of the blacks at the door, 'that slave with the axe in his hand? He was the public executioner when I was Viceroy of Naples, and in virtue of his office, sundry heads of knightly rank, and of the proudest of the Neapolitan grandees, fell beneath his axe. 'Tis he that is to do the work on you. You shall die, then, not as a peasant, but as what you tell me you are, a hidalgo.' He stopped, and for some time silence reigned in the chamber. It was broken by the Count of Saldagna.

'My dear friend,' continued he, 'this is a sudden and a fearful

tragedy. I pray you bethink you well before you act it.'

'Not a word, Silva,' said the old man, authoritatively. 'In such a matter as this I am the sole judge. I repeat, then, not a word.

'But would you,' continued his aged companion, 'have him die

unconfessed, without the consolations of holy church?'

'No,' said the duke, after reflecting for a moment. 'I would not kill both body and soul. I remind me, that when the never-to-be-forgotten Juan de Padilla was condemned to death, they allowed him to live till sundown, that he might hear the Ave Maria, and be comforted. So shall it be with this boy. When the sun has set, and the blessed bell that speaks to all Catholic hearts the solace of religion has tolled from the church, then shall he die.'

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the door of the music gallery overhead was heard to shut with a sharp, quick sound, as if some one had departed, and in their anxiety to leave the chamber had forgot the caution which had marked them while its occupant.

## CHAPTER XXIV

# THE PRIEST AND THE DUENNA.

WE must change the scene to another chamber in the palace of the Duke of Escalona.

It may be in the recollection of our readers that the Cardinal had accidentally ascertained from his confidant and schoolmate, that he was acquainted with one of the household of the Grand Chamberlain.

The intimacy was, in fact, much greater than Di Castro had been willing to allow. Some thirty years before the time of which we write, the canon of St. Jago, then a young man of one-and-twenty, and just admitted to priests' orders, chanced to be in Naples, and had been selected as confessor by a fair widow. The lady in after years became the governess of the granddaughter of the Duke of Escalona, when Viceroy of Naples. She had followed her charge to Spain as her duenna; and thither, when the friendship of Alberoni and his increasing power had enabled him to provide for the companion of his youth, came also her admirer, Benedict Di Castro. It is needless to say that the old intimacy was renewed. He was received with open arms, and the worthy priest reinstated in all his

privileges as father confessor.

The only cloud that dimmed their happiness, or rather the happiness of the lady, for we are obliged to confess that the gentleman bore the misfortune with Christian philosophy, was the bigotry of the Duke of Escalona. He detested Alberoni, and—a true Spaniard —his power of hating was wonderful. Unhappily for the devotions of Donna Violante, his dislike was not limited to the Cardinal, but was extended to his household, and indeed to his countrymen. In the case of Benedict Di Castro the hostility was carried even further. The old noble had been informed, through the jealousy of an ecclesiastic of his establishment, who resented a foreign shaveling poaching on his manor, that Father Benedict as he was called. was a confidential friend of the hated Prime Minister. This was quite sufficient to raise to boiling heat the already too fervent blood of the irritable chief of the Pachecos. Di Castro was forbidden the house, and the exclusion was accompanied by a gentle hint that the Duke of Escalona enjoyed in his seignorial capacity the right of pit and gallows, and that in the event of the Italian priest intruding himself within the forbidden limits, it was not impossible that Don John Pacheco might forget his cloth, and re-exert that privilege of sending men to the other world, for the use or abuse of which, to confess the truth, the hot-headed old grandee, when Vicerov of Naples, had been a little too famous.

Had the Duke of Escalona known as much of love affairs as of viceroyalties, he would have spared himself all this trouble. It was a blunder to endeavour to prevent Donna Violante seeing her priestly admirer. It was worse than insanity to threaten to make life the price of the interview. The lady had become less loving, the gentleman had long been indifferent, but the difficulty and the danger restored their affection at once to its full fervour, and gave it the air of a romance; and being forbidden to meet at any time,

they resolved, as a matter of course, to meet frequently.

After all, the obstacles to be surmounted were not so formidable; at least the woman's wit of Donna Violante found a way of evading them.

The palace of the Duke of Escalona stood, as we have mentioned, in the Calle de Toledo, in the immediate neighbourhood of the

Puerta del Sol. A portion of the building was of great age, and was said to go back as far as the days of the Moors. Of the ancient structure, the banqueting-hall, in which had taken place the meeting of Clifford and Therese, was a portion. Over the door, as we have mentioned, was a gallery, now occupied by musicians on occasions of ceremony. Its original destination, if tradition was to be believed, was different. It was said to have been intended for the reception of the ladies of the harem of its original lords, as a place from which they, themselves unseen, could survey the revels and revellers beneath. What gave support to the rumour was the fact that the gallery in front was separated from the hall by a screen of walnut-wood, carved in the fantastic patterns in which arabesque delights, and which, while it was sufficiently open to permit the tenants of the unlighted gallery to see what was passing in the room below, was still dark enough to prevent any one in the chamber itself seeing, or even guessing at the presence of those above.

The place was seldom used, for the Duke of Escalona, from age, had given up festive meetings, and the narrow unlighted chamber was thus visited at rare intervals. Superstition too added to its solitude. It was whispered that a lady of the harem, of high rank, had there, in a fit of jealousy, stabbed a beautiful female slave, who had dared to signify her presence to some cavalier beneath by thrusting a handkerchief through one of the narrow openings. Thus, doubly guarded by its visionary horrors and by neglect, the place was rarely approached, and its loneliness marked it out to the suggestive mind of Donna Violante as a safe rendezvous for herself

and the forbidden Di Castro.

When the plan had been once decided on, the worthy dame, with all her usual energy, lost no time in carrying it into execution. She contrived to abstract from the bunch of the too confiding major domo, the key of the gallery door: had its exact counterpart made by a blacksmith in the neighbourhood, and restored the original without its absence having been discovered. As soon as she had ascertained that the new key fitted exactly, she procured a second edition of it from the artisan who had fabricated the first, and had it conveyed to Di Castro. From that day the dark nook had been the constant place of meeting of Donna Violante and her confessor.

In truth a better could hardly have been selected, as the banqueting-room stood at the extreme end of the palace of the Duke of Escalona, and the door of the gallery opened from a small dark chamber, connected by a corridor with a suite of rooms beyond; a spiral staircase in the thickness of the wall led to the garden below, while that in its turn opened into the street by a portal fastened in the inside by a bolt, which the wily duenna took care should be withdrawn on the day and hour when she expected her visitor.

Di Castro, we have said, had mentioned to Alberoni that he had been informed by his old friend of her return from France, and had received in consequence instructions to renew the acquaintance immediately, and elicit, if possible, the object of the journey, and more especially to ascertain if it were connected with the intrigues of Lord Stanhope and the English envoy. In obedience to these injunctions, he had sent to the duenna a messenger, requesting an interview at their old rendezvous.

The answer was, to a certain degree, favourable. Donna Violante would be delighted to see Father Benedict; but she had suffered from the fatigues of travelling, thought the gallery too cold, and preferred receiving him in her own private apartment. She added, that there was nothing to prevent his coming there with safety, as her young lady was about to spend the forenoon abroad, and the duke had of late shut himself up entirely in his own room, and saw no one. The time fixed for the interview was shortly after mid-day, as at that hour the inhabitants of the palace would have betaken themselves to their siesta, and the gallery and hall would be deserted.

With these instructions Di Castro literally complied; and about an hour before Clifford had left the Colle de la Cabeza, the priest

made his way to the apartment of Donna Violante.

The worthy dame had appropriated for her own use a handsome room at the back of the house looking upon the gardens. Like those occupied by ladies of a certain age, it was redolent of comfort. The cushions of its chairs were of the softest; its Turkey carpet thick in its pile; the curtains of its windows a heavy velvet. The brazier in its centre filled with charcoal. These are the luxuries of coming age, and an attention to them for the most part marks its approach. But Violante, though verging 'on the sear and yellow leaf,' was still a woman; and every woman, whatever be her years, has a green spot in her heart, in which flourish unwithered the romantic feelings of her youth. The worthy duenna had not outlived their influence; and upon the table near her, flaunted some pieces of Dresden china, which represented the ancient Arcadia—at least as Arcadia was represented in the eighteenth century. Shepherds in green velvet coats and knee breeches, flowered waistcoats, long periwigs, and lace cravats, knelt at the feet of shepherdesses in hoops and jewelled stomachers, and high-heeled shoes; while a guitar, with a flaming ribbon of great breadth attached to it, lay by the side of the pastoral bijouterie of the table, and with a lace mantilla of the newest pattern, showed that the lady had not as yet resigned her claims to enthral all hearts and charm all eyes.

To this apartment Di Castro made his way without obstacle. The usual greetings were paid, the usual assurances uttered, that neither party had ever looked so well, or since their last meeting appeared a day older. When these conventionalities had been duly discharged, the wily priest set about attaining the real object of his visit. But in this he was scarcely so successful as he had hoped; not from any reserve on the part of the duenna, but simply because she had not been trusted, and had little to tell. As to the French portion of her visit, her reminiscences were a mere blank. She could not speak the language, and was too old to learn it; and all the information she could give to her ecclesiastical admirer was, that after ac-

companying her charge to Paris, she had returned immediately to Bayonne, and had there for the past year lived in a very quiet way,

in a dirty street, in a dull part of the town.

On the incidents of the journey, however, she was more eloquent. She described the meeting with Clifford at Irun—his joining their party at the request of Donna Teresa—his gallantry at the Somo Sierra—and more especially (for what woman from the sunny South is not eloquent on the subject?) she dilated with Italian energy upon the great beauty of his person. Of his real rank, it was not difficult to discover she was entirely ignorant; and, of course, her companion took no trouble to enlighten her with his suspicions on the subject.

'And so, Donna Violante,' continued Di Castro, 'this young man, this contrabandista that you speak of, was very handsome?' 'Oh, more than handsome, Father Benedict,' said the impassioned Neapolitan, clasping her hands and turning up her eyes; 'he was posi-

tively beautiful—a perfect St. Sebastian.

'Ah, cruel,' said the priest, taking her hand, and squeezing it gently; 'if you speak after that fashion I shall be jealous, miserable, wretched.'

'Deceiver!' said the lady; and she accompanied the words by

giving her admirer a gentle tap on the fingers with her fan.

'Ah, 'tis all very well,' continued the priest, 'to endeavour to turn the tables on me; but I am not to be so gulled. It is clear enough that this squire of dames has made an impression upon more hearts than one.'

'How can you talk so?' said the dame, bridling with pleasure, and fanning herself violently. 'You forget, Father Benedict, that

he is but a boy, and I am an old woman.

'And how can you talk so?' was the gallant reply. 'When I knew you first there was not a fairer dame in the Toledo, and your eyes are as bright and as killing as ever. Ah, faithless, faithless Donna Violante!'

'No constant—ever constant. I do not deny but that the lad did occasionally,' and the blushing dowager hid her face with her fan, 'look as if he did think those eyes of mine merited the praises you bestow upon them; but I gave him no encouragement—none whatever. I thought of you, my dear Benedict, and was true.'

Di Castro made sundry grimaces, intended to express that he still entertained suspicions. 'And this young man,' said he at length, 'was merely a contrabandista?' 'Yes; but such a contrabandista! He had as gallant a bearing as if he had been a grandee; and then he had such bright laughing blue eyes, and beautiful auburn hair, and teeth like pearls, and such a lovely mouth, and a skin as white as a girl's neck. O, caro mio, era bello—era bellissimo—bellissimo.' And once more the enthusiastic dame clasped her hands in the ardour of her admiration.

'I knew it; I was sure of it,' said the priest, in affected pique. 'It does seem that it was impossible for any woman to resist him,

for a blind man might see that the fellow has robbed me of your

heart, Violante.'

'Now do not be foolish with your jealousy, Benedict,' said the dame, as she leant over and imprinted a conciliatory kiss upon his cheek. 'You men never understand women; and when we describe the feelings of others, you fancy we but picture our own. Ungrateful fellow!' continued she, casting a loving glance at her admirer; 'my constancy never swerved, no not for one small instant. I will not say so much for the indifference of Donna Teresa.'

'And she loved him?' 'I suspect so.'

'And has she seen him since their return to Madrid?' 'Never. 'Are you assured of that?' 'I would swear it on my breviary. But who comes here?' continued she, in astonishment, and looking towards the garden; 'Donna Teresa Pacheco, as I live, and she is running. Something must have alarmed her; and a young hidalgo following her. Madre de Dios,' continued she, clasping her hands as Clifford approached, and his features could be distinguished. 'It is he, though he has changed his dress. It is the contrabandista.

Begone, Father Benedict, I would not for a golden rosary that you were found here.'

Di Castro, more self-possessed than his companion, had eagerly watched the new comer, and studied with an accurate eye his person. He then, in obedience to the wishes of the duenna, left the room. He had reached the end of the corridor, when his further progress was intercepted by the entrance into the great hall of Donna Teresa.

For an instant the young lady lingered there; but on the appearance of Clifford, she again, as may be recollected, fled, and took refuge in the banqueting-room, followed as before by her pertinacious admirer.

'Ha!' said the quick-witted priest; 'there is to be a private conference I see, but it will go hard, but I will be a witness to the *téte-à-téte*.'

With the words he retraced his steps, and once more presented himself to the eyes of the terrified duenna.

'The key,' said he; 'quick—quick! The key of the gallery of

the banqueting-room?

'Why do you come back?' replied his agitated companion; 'Madre de Dios! There is danger. There will be bloodshed. That fierce old man will murder you!'

'Nonsense, Donna Violante; danger there is none. But the key,

I tell you. Give me immediately the key.'

The duenna, with trembling hands, took it from a drawer; uttering, as she did so, a thousand incoherent questions as to the purpose for which it was required. They were not answered, for Di Castro wrung the key from her fingers; and telling her that he would at a future period inform her of the reasons of his conduct, hurried from the room.

Two minutes saw him safe at the gallery-door. He opened it

cautiously, and having entered, relocked it on the inside, but in so noiseless a manner, that the young lovers below, deeply occupied as they were with each other, were unconscious of his approach, and there the priest heard every word of the conversation. All was revealed to him—the identity of the contrabandista and Colonel Clifford; the scheme for the overthrow of Alberoni; the intense passion of the young envoy for his fair companion; and the belief that the fair lady, notwithstanding her affected coldness, returned his affection.

'I am like to make a good day's work of it,' said he to himself.
'This is precisely the link that the Cardinal wanted; but I must take care that Julio does not hurt the lad. I have been in a difficulty from running after a petticoat myself, and for old recollection's sake, must bring him off, if I can, scot-free. The Cardinal owes me a boon for this day's service. Cospetto! I have a claim on his gratitude.'

That claim was destined to be greater than he had anticipated. He had heard the approach of the nobles. He had seen Clifford take refuge behind the arras, and had witnessed the proceedings of the conspirators. They departed, but the good-natured priest still lingered.

'The young fellow is in the lion's den,' said he to himself; 'I

will not move till he is free from it.'

With what followed, the reader is already acquainted. The discovery of the young soldier in his hiding place; the sitting in judgment of the two nobles; the black slaves; the axes; the cord; the pronouncement of the final doom of the prisoner, all were witnessed in turn with feelings in which terror and interest were strangely mingled. At length when the Duke of Escalona had announced that Clifford was to be executed at sundown, the kind-hearted Di Castro could delay no longer. He opened the door, closed it somewhat incautiously after him, and hastily locking it, hurried down the spiral staircase. He found himself in the garden. Two minutes more placed him beside the narrow portal in its wall. To draw the bolt and gain the street was the work of an instant, and he took his way towards the palace as fast as his limbs could carry him. On other occasions it had been his habit to wait respectfully till the usher on the outside of Alberoni's apartment had announced him. But the present was no time for ceremony, and rushing past the astonished janitor, he opened the door himself, and entered the room.

The surprise of the Cardinal may well be imagined. The speed with which Di Castro had run, and the agitation of his feelings, had exhausted his strength, and he sank on a chair beside his patron, breathless, motionless, his face pale as death, and feature and manner

alike intimating terror and excitement.

'Are you mad, Di Castro?' said the minister. 'Have you seen a ghost, or have you committed murder?' 'That's the word, Julio,' said the priest; 'there is a murder to be committed. He is to die at sundown.'

'Who is to die?' 'The man you spoke of two days ago—the

English envoy.'

'Well, Di Castro,' said the minister, coldly, 'that is not a matter in which I need take much interest; I shall have one en my the less.'

'And will you allow the conspirators to put him to death?'

'The conspirators!' said Alberoni, in surprise. 'What mean you?' 'Why, the Duke of Escalona, the Count of Saldagna, and the others, who, for the last two hours, have been planning your arrest at the palace of the Grand Chamberlain!'

'Ha!' said the Cardinal, starting to his feet. 'This is a more important matter than the death of Stanhope's envoy. Quick—haste

ve man. Tell me what you have heard.

'Not one word, Julio,' said his companion, who had now recovered his self-possession. 'Not one word unless you promise to save the boy.'

'Are you mad, indeed, Di Castro?' replied the minister. 'What interest can you have in the whelp?' He came here, as you know

well, to plot the ruin of me, your friend-your master.'

'I care not, Julio, I honour the lad. He preferred death to telling a woman's secret, and I will save him; or, if not, you may go fish out intelligence of conspiracies yourself, for you will get none from me.'

'Well, you surly, obstinate brute,' said the Cardinal, laughing, 'I will save the boy; so let us hear about the conspiracy, and at once.' 'But you have no time to lose; he is to die at sundown.'

'The conspiracy,' said Alberoni, coldly. 'Benedict Di Castro, tell me of the conspiracy.' 'Why, then, in two words, Julio, the Duke of Escalona and a dozen more have entered into an engagement, with the aid of Father d'Aubenton, to have you arrested.'

'That's bad,' said Alberoni, in a cold tone; 'but it is not treason. I must have something more; said they aught of touching the person of the king?' 'The Count of Lemos proposed to seize him, but it was negatived.'

'The Count of Lemos proposed it, you say?' 'Yes.'

'You are ready to make oath of that before the Council of Castile.' 'I am.'

'Then I have safe ground to go upon, and can act. Where is your protégé?' 'In the banqueting-room of Escalona's palace. It is there the murder is to take place. If he be not rescued before the

Ave Maria, he is a gone man!'

'Di Castro,' said the Cardinal, 'you will await my return here. I would hear further details.' He passed, as he spoke, into an adjoining apartment, and lifting a heavy silver hand-bell from the table, rang it. The summons was instantly answered, and an usher entered.

'What regiment of guards is on duty to-day at the palace?'

'The Walloons, your Eminence.'

'Tell Colonel Zerclas that I want him instantly! Do you hear, sir, instantly!' The usher bowed low and retired, and immediately a bluff, square-faced, broad-shouldered, good-tempered,

determined-looking man, with an undeniable German physiognomy, entered the room.

The Cardinal gave him some orders, and the old soldier hurriedly departed. In an instant after came from below the clatter of arms. and a voice, 'Leading file, to the left, march.' Scarcely were the words uttered, when the heavy tread of a body of men was heard to issue from the courtyard, but they moved at a rapid pace, and the echoes of their steps soon died away in the distance.

# CHAPTER XXV.

#### THE HEADSMAN AND THE BLOCK.

WE must return to our friend Clifford.

The clang of the closing door was heard alike by the two nobles and their prisoner, and all three involuntarily turned their eyes upwards; they then, unconsciously perhaps, looked the one at the other, as if in suspicion, for to the ear of each the note had told a different tale. To the captive it promised hope, to his gaolers it whispered of disappointed vengeance. But the temper of the Duke of Escalona was too fiery to allow him to be long silent.

'Ha!' said he, 'have we had more spies upon us than one? Was this,' continued he, turning to Clifford, 'a comrade of yours?

and has he gone to denounce us?'

Ere the young envoy could reply, the duke hurried from the room, and hastened to the door of the gallery overhead. He found it locked, and on sending for the major domo was assured by that aged functionary that the key had never been out of his possession. Still more astonished, his master ordered him to open the mysterious portal. He was immediately obeyed, but there was nothing to reward his curiosity. The gallery was empty.

'Was it a deception of the enemy?' muttered he. 'Yet Saldagna and that treacherous boy heard it like myself, for I saw them raise their eyes. No, it must have been some one, probably a confederate, on the espial. Be it so. The fellow has seen the commencement of the tragedy. It shall be my care that none but permitted eyes

witness its close,'

With the words, he once more descended to the hall.

'I fear escape,' whispered he to his aged kinsman. 'We must make sure of our captive.'

'You would not,' replied the Count of Saldagna, in the same low

tone, 'you would not shed his blood now?'

'No,' replied Escalona, 'I have promised he shall live till sundown; but as soon as the last tongue of the bell has tolled the Ave-Maria, he dies.'

In the mean time, the black slaves had been standing at the door each with his axe upon his shoulder, as still and motionless as if they had been hewn out of marble. They now, at a sign from their master, advanced, and seizing upon their prisoner, placed him in one of the arm-chairs, and bound him to the back of it with cords.

They then resumed their statue-like attitude near the door.

'I should hold him to be safe now,' whispered the duke to Saldagna, 'and we might depart, for I have ever found the blacks faithful; but in a case such as this I will risk nothing. Ere an hour be passed, the sun will set. I will remain here till all is over.'

The duke spoke hesitatingly, and his usually bold eye fell before

the glance of his companion.

'You have another reason, Pacheco,' said his friend; 'you dare

not face the girl.'

'You are right, Silva. At present, probably, she thinks he has escaped; but if I saw her she might draw suspicion from my manner, and though I must and ought to deal harshly with her, there are moments in which I cannot depend upon myself, and her tears might make me swerve from the justice to which my duty compels me. No, it is best; in every way it is best. I will remain here. But I must not give way to these childish feelings. We must prepare.'

Again the duke made a sign to the slaves, and, depositing their axes, they left the apartment; their master himself locking the door after them, and from his bent head and anxious eye evidently watching eagerly for their return. It was not long delayed. In a few minutes a gentle tap was heard. They were re-admitted, and the door once more carefully barred. What they bore with them was a low square block, covered with red cloth, and this they placed in the centre of the apartment. Clifford shivered when he looked at it, for its presence but too well explained its purpose.

In the mean time the minutes passed on. Nearly an hour had elapsed since the duke had pronounced the doom of his captive, and the early night of a November day already heralded its approach by the rapidly darkening shadows. At length the sun went down, and as its last rays faded away from the lofty windows of the great hall,

the Duke of Escalona once more broke silence.

'Young man,' said he, 'the moments of your existence are running fast. Is life dear to you?' 'It is dear to all,' was the answer, 'and most of all to the young.'

'Then may you still save it, if you will confess when, and where,

and how, you won the love of Donna Teresa Pacheco.'

'You insult me,' replied the young soldier, 'by repeating a question which reflects upon the honour of one so pure. I tell you

again I confess nothing.

'You are obstinate, then. May your blood be upon your own head! But, as I said before, I will not destroy body and soul. In another minute will sound the bell of the Ave Maria, and I will release you from your bonds that, ere you leave this world, you may prostrate yourself before your Maker.'

The old noble loosed the cords as he spoke, and his captive was once more free. At the same moment the great bell of St. Isidro

tolled the hour of prayer. With the sound the captors and the captive sank alike upon their knees, and for awhile nothing could be heard, save the almost inarticulate mutterings of the worshippers. In a few moments the duke rose, and his example was followed by his companions. Once more he made a sign to one of the slaves, whispering to Saldagna as he did so,—

'We must have light for the work.'

The black, it appeared, understood his master's meaning, for he drew a pouch from the inside of the shawl which formed his girdle, produced a flint and steel, and struck a light. With this he illuminated eight large torches which rested in sconces projecting from the tapestry on either side of the room. Once more the master of the house made a signal, and it was, as before, obeyed. The blacks approached the prisoner, and began to strip him, preparatory to the last fatal scene. They removed his coat and vest, opened his shirt, and folded it carefully back from the shoulders, so that nothing might impede the edge of the axe. This done they bound his arms, and placing him between them, led him to the red covered block, and forced him down upon his knees by its side. One then took post behind him, while the other tucked up the loose sleeves of his caftan to the shoulders, and seizing his axe with both hands, awaited the signal of his master.

It was a scene worthy of a painter. The immense room, with its tapestry-covered walls—the dim light of the torches—the kneeling figure—the plumed and velvet-draped nobles—the black slaves, in their crimson robes and turbans, looking even more ghastly from their white teeth, and the fierce glare of their African eye. To any one who could have gazed at it for a moment, it might have seemed that he was looking at a group of statues, so still were the five figures, so

motionless, so silent.

Once more the duke addressed Clifford.

'I know not why it is, boy,' said he, 'but there is something in your bearing that tempts me to like you, even in spite of myself. You are young—you have many years before you. Will you not purchase life? Will you not confess when and where you won the love of Donna Teresa l'acheco?'

The pulse of the young soldier beat wildly—his heart throbbed—there was a choking feeling in his throat, and once more the colour came to his cheek, and brightness to his eye. It was but for an instant, however. In another moment his face had recovered its usual character of cold, calm composure, and in a low, but firm voice he said:—

'Senor, I have already answered, I confess nothing. I will but say this that the time will come when you would rather have cut off your right hand than do what you are about to do this day.'

'That risk be mine,' said the old man haughtily; 'and yet, heaven knows, I would have saved you, but you will not; and what must be must be.'

With these words, he made a sign to the slave who stood behind

Clifford. The black had been too well trained to his trade of blood not to understand him, for he tied a handkerchief over the eyes of the prisoner, and forced his head down upon the block.

'And now, Hassan,' said the duke, addressing himself to the negro with the axe, who stood opposite, 'when I raise my finger,

strike.'

Again there was a pause. It might be that the old noble repeuted; for a minute he stood motionless, and the only sound that broke the stillness of the chamber was the short, hard beating of the prisoner's heart. But the delay was not long-lived. Suddenly the brow of the duke lowered, his lips compressed themselves, and he was about to raise the fatal finger, when at that instant the rapid but measured step of a large body of men was heard in the outer hall, and at the same moment a violent blow was struck on the door of the chamber, accompanied with a cry of, 'Open in the king's name.'

Apparently the assailants were too eager for admission to await an answer, for almost with the words half-a-dozen heavy axes were applied to the portal. It gave way before them, and a large body of armed men, in the uniform of the royal guard, rushed into the room.

'Der Teufel! I am just in time,' said the leader, whose white moustache and square jolly countenance would have proclaimed his German parentage, even if his accent had not led to the detection of it. 'Just in time, by all the Hogen Mogens. But a minute later, and the youngster would have been sped. Unbind that fellow there,' continued he, addressing some of the men who accompanied him, 'and if these black sons of the devil resist, send them to their father at once.'

The duke, on the first appearance of his unexpected visitors, had been speechless with astonishment. He had now, however, recovered himself, and turning to the officer in command, 'What means, Baron Zerclas, this insolence? Know you that you will have to answer before the Council of Castile for having violently entered the house of a grandee of Spain?'

'If I must answer before the Council,' replied the old soldier, in a laughing tone, 'I suppose I must. But I believe that it will be your excellency who will first be submitted to its judgment.'

'.Upon what grounds?" 'As traitor to our sovereign lord,

Philip V., King of Spain and the Indies.'

'It is false.' 'That is a matter you must argue with those who have the right to argue it with you. My duty is more simple, and I now perform it. I, Tellez Zerelas, Colonel of the Walloon Guard, arrest you, Don John Pacheco, Knight of the Golden Fleece, Duke of Escalona, Marquis of Villenas and Moya, Count of Gormas and Quixena, and Lord of Belmont, for high treason.'

'The charge is false,' repeated the old noble, in his usual tone of haughty self-possession, and such I will prove it to be, when the time comes. At present I have no other duty than to obey the

orders of my sovereign. Whither go I?' 'To Segovia. The carriage is at the door, and my lieutenant will accompany you."

'I dreamed,' said the old man, haughtily, his grandee pride exhibiting itself, even amid his misfortune, 'that if the head of the house Pacheco were to be a prisoner, it would have been no dishonour for the captain of the Walloon guard himself to have been his gaoler.'

The Fleming laughed. 'The slight, believe me, your excellency,' said he, 'if slight it be, is none of mine. I must obey orders, and I

have at present other duties. Beckendorf, do your office.'

The officer addressed, advanced towards the duke, and bowing low, led the way to the door. A carriage with four mules was in attendance. The duke entered and was followed by the lieutenant of the Walloon guard, and a subaltern officer. Two more, with loaded carbines, took their place on the box. The word was given that all was ready, and in another minute, the unfortunate Grand Chamberlain was on his way to the ancient fortress, which for centuries had

been the state-prison of Spain.

We must now return to Clifford. Great joy is, perhaps, more violent in its effects than great grief—at least it was so with the young soldier. He had listened with a deaf ear to the temptations held out by Don John Pacheco, and he had awaited calmly, but resolutely, the approach of the fatal axe. But the unexpected appearance of his deliverers, and the sudden change from hopelessness to hope, had produced so violent a revulsion of feeling, that a slight faintness came over him, and he swooned. The removal of the cords, however, from his arms, and the bandage from his eyes, restored him to consciousness, and he heard, with something like astonishment, that the late arbiter of his life, by one of the sudden changes of Fortune's wheel, was himself a prisoner. Of his own fate he could not doubt. He felt that the attention of the king's officers had been directed to himself, and that it was probable, as satisfactory explanations were impossible, that his character as British envoy would soon be suspected, even if it were not already known. It was worth while, however, making an effort for liberty, and it was, therefore, though with something like agitation that he addressed himself to the officer in command.

'I am indebted to you for my life, and of course my liberty, for I suppose that whatever be the crimes of the Duke of Escalona, I at least, who was about to suffer death at his hands, cannot be sup-

posed to share them.'

'True, young sir, and well argued,' said the old Fleming, with a laugh, but there are other offences against the laws than those committed by the Grand Chamberlain.' 'I understand you not.'

'I must explain them. You are my prisoner.'
'On what grounds?'
'They will tell you who are permitted.'

'And do I too go to Segovia?" 'That is a matter which will be discussed hereafter. In the mean time I would counsel you to resume your dress; but this is no tiring chamber. Ho! major domo,' shouted he to one of the terrified menials, who in sign of his office, wore a gold chain passed thrice round his neck. 'Show us to the duke's bedroom. Hillo! there, gentlemen of the chamber—pages and lights.'

In Spain, in the eighteenth century, the king's name was a talisman, and those who spoke in it were implicitly obeyed. Four pages, with wax lights, preceded by the senior domestic, led the way to the

sleeping quarters of the Grand Chamberlain.

'Ay,' said Zerclas, as he arranged his moustache before an immense Venetian mirror which decorated one end of the apartment, 'this is a better tiring-room than the other. Now, senor cabal-

lero,' continued he, turning to Clifford, 'to your toilet,'

Had the young officer been left to himself, it would have been speedily performed, for he was in no humour for foppery, but his conductor was apparently not so easily satisfied, for he insisted on his prisoner exhausting all the minutiæ of personal decoration. Hot and cold water—scented soaps—perfumes—essences were each applied in their turn by the obedient high-born valets of the head of the house of Pacheco. Once more Clifford was apparelled. His satin doublet, his velvet jacket, his ruff, received the most graceful set from the experienced hands that arranged his dress—the very curl of his moustache was not neglected. At length he was attired point device, and the whimsical old soldier, as he surveyed him carefully from head to foot, appeared satisfied.

"Now, sir prisoner,' said he, 'we are fit to show ourselves with respectability in any gaol in Spain. Come, follow me to your

dungeon.'

He led the way as he spoke to the outer door. A carriage was awaiting them, and as soon as the Fleming and his captive had entered it, it movedoff at a rapid pace. For half-an-hour it travelled with unabated speed through streets whose darkness prevented their being recognised by Clifford, and at length stopped suddenly at a small door opening into a gloomy-looking building, apparently from the masses which here and there might be seen looming through the darkness, defended with towers. The carriage door was opened, and the old Fleming left it, and called to his companion to follow Clifford obeyed. His conductor rapped at the door, and immediately it moved back obedient on its hinges, and as if by magic, for no one appeared behind it. Again the old officer said, 'Follow me,' and, with Clifford at his heels, mounted a gloomy staircase, and passing through an apartment at the top, equally ill lighted, stopped at a door at the end of it. The Fleming tapped gently, and on receiving an intimation from within, opened it, pushed Clifford forward, and without entering himself, reclosed the door.

The young soldier looked round him with astonishment. He found himself in a large and splendidly furnished apartment, hung with the richest velvets, covered with paintings, and brilliantly lighted. In the centre was a table, on which in plate of gold and silver were numerous dishes. There were but two chairs placed

beside it, and one was already occupied by a man with a round, pleasant face, in a cardinal's dress. It was Alberoni.

As the young soldier entered, he rose and advanced towards him,

and extending his hand with frank courtesy, said,

'Good evening, Colonel Clifford. You are late. The supper has been awaiting you these five minutes.'

### CHAPTER XXVI.

#### THE MINISTER AND THE ENVOY.

THE young soldier took mechanically the hand that was offered him, though stupified as he was from the sudden change from darkness to a blaze of light, and still more by the startling vicissitudes which had marked the last half-hour of his existence; his manner intimated distinctly enough the confusion of his thoughts. Alberoni's quick eye marked his embarrassment.

'Come, Colonel Clifford,' said the Cardinal, laughing, 'the supper cools, and I am enough of an epicure to know that half-cold meat is scarce worth the eating. Come, I say, take your place,' and the

Cardinal re-seated himself, and pointed to the vacant chair.

The young envoy had by this time recovered his self-possession.

'May I ask,' said he-

'Not a word, not a syllable,' said the Cardinal, interrupting him with a laugh. 'There is an old adage about the difference between Philip full and Philip fasting, and it is possible,' continued he, with a smile, 'that there are others beside the king of Macedon whose present temper may be improved by a meal. Come, let us see what they have given us,' and he removed the covers from the dishes near him.

The table was profusely served with meats, evidently the work of a first-rate artist. The sight seemed to produce agreeable feelings in the master of the house, for his eyes, as they roved from dish to

dish, resumed their ordinary joyous expression.

'Yes,' said he, as he snuffed the perfumed air. 'This is the real parterre, and this its best bouquet. Talk of the "Encens des fleurs" indeed! I should know, as well as any one, what forms the beauty of a garden, considering that I began life in dressing its flower-beds; and I can safely aver, that the best part of it are its more substantial productions, and they are never half so exquisite as when on a supper-table. Will you taste the soup?' And he passed to Clifford a silver basin. The young envoy accepted the dish offered, and was soon doing ample justice to its contents.

'Ah! you like it,' said the Cardinal. 'You appreciate the skill of my artist.' Clifford expressed his admiration of his handiwork, and added, 'that it was not every Spaniard could produce such a dish.'

'Why, you do not,' said Alberoni, as he put down his spoon in undisguised astonishment, 'you do not really suppose that a Spaniard could dress a supper like this? Are you so little acquainted with

the country which is said by the proverb to have "five hundred masses and not one sauce?" No, no, my young friend, I would not treat my worst enemy so cruelly as to condemn him to a real Spanish repast—a mere show, without the substance—a service of plate and starvation. Had you had the misfortune to sup with the Duke of Albuquerque to-night, you would have had gold and silver dishes enough for three viceroys of Mexico, and probably two eggs and a pigeon beneath their covers.'

'And whence, may I ask, comes your artist?'

'My cordon bleu is French—for you may recollect,' he added, with a satirical laugh, 'that my master, the king of Spain, is uncle and nearest relative to Louis XV., and I do my best to rivet the connection. But, from patriotic feeling towards the country over which I rule, I have also in my establishment a Spanish sous chef, and you have here the handiwork of both. So which prefer you—France or Spain?'

The question was asked with an insidious smile, and evidently

covered a double meaning.

'I will adhere, your Eminence, to the north of the Pyrenees,' said Clifford, entering into the joke. 'If I have a prejudice on earth, it

is in favour of a Vol au vent.'

'Then here,' said the Cardinal, as he pushed a dish towards him, 'is one that will do honour to my recommendation. See the dark brown walls of its crust! and that tender pullet inside—and those delicate buttons at top. As Demosthenes, when asked what were the three parts of eloquence, said, "Gesture, gesture, so I, were I required to name the three special requisites for giving piquancy to food, should say, "Mushrooms, mushrooms,"—So to the Vol au vent, my friend, and show yourself a valiant trencherman. As for myself, I will, as in duty bound, for to-night at least, adhere to Castile. Let us see what Don Jacinto has got for me: a man who, let me tell you, boasts of being the lineal descendant of King Pelayo. But what says the carte—A pinto—Ha, hum! these meat omelettes—pretty well. A guisado de perdices—stewed partridges, not amiss. Sesos escabichados y fritos—brains en marinade—excellent,' excellent! and the Amphitryon devoted himself, heart and soul, to the good things before him. For some minutes not a word was uttered, and the only sound that broke upon the ear was the gentle clatter of knives and forks, as the host and his guest gave themselves up with emulous energy to their meal.

'But come,' continued the master of the house, after a while, 'we are but supping by halves. "Sine Baccho friget Ceres." The proverb is not exactly that which the Romans have handed down to us, but I hold the other as not altogether orthodox from the lips of a churchman. Taste me this Manzanilla. Nay, hold the flask well above the goblet, and you will see how its drops sparkle in the gold. Vaya—not bad, is it?"

And so the Cardinal rattled on.—His manner joyous as that of a

man who had not a thought beyond the pleasures of the present hour: now seasoning his conversation with some quaint bit of epicurean connoisseurship, and now with some anecdote full of point and exquisitely told, of the distinguished men and women with whom his varied fortunes had brought him into companionship.

At length the meal approached its close. The more solid viands were removed, and their place supplied with chocolate and coffee,

sweet wines and fruit.

'Come,' said the Cardinal, as he drew in his chair towards the brazier, and motioned to his guest to follow his example, 'fill one of those Venetian glasses with liqueur; you will find on the table both Muscatel and Pajarete. They will flavour the mouth agreeably after that luscious compound, for, I must say, the cocoa from his Majesty's pet farm in the Philippines is somewhat of the richest. And now,' continued he, with a laugh, 'perhaps you will inform me to what I am indebted for the pleasure of Colonel Clifford's company here to-night?'

'You give a foreign appellation to a Spanish gentleman,' said the envoy with a smile, 'but, however little I may be entitled to bear it, the name, for conversation, will serve as well as another—yet in this you have the advantage of me. You have asked me a question. May I ask one in my turn? May I inquire to whom it is that I am to address my reply?' 'I fear that, for a diplomatist, you are rather dull,' replied the prime minister. 'I think my dress might

have informed you of the name of the wearer.'

'The Cardinal!' exclaimed Clifford. 'Even so—Julio Alberoni.'

'And am I to consider myself as a guest or a prisoner?'

'As a guest for the present—for the future, the proverb says, "we

should not peer into it."

'Then prime ministers,' said Clifford, with a smile, 'err hugely against the precept—for if they do not succeed in enacting the part of seers, it is from no want of making the attempt."

'And you would imply, that young envoys being prime ministers

in embryo, should adopt the same diplomatic rule?

- 'The deduction of your Eminence may be a correct one, but, pardon me for saying, I do not see its application.'
  - 'Cospetto! It is simple enough. Are not you a young envoy?'

'I am the guest of the prime minister of Spain.'

'And before he had the honour of your company, how is he to describe you?' 'As your Eminence has rescued me from my thraldom, I suppose I need scarcely inform you.'

'As the captive of Don John Pacheco?' Clifford bowed.

'And before the grim old grandee laid hands on you, were you the captive of any one else?'

Clifford coloured. The Cardinal gave a malicious smile.

'Nay,' continued he, 'I might have been in error—but the house of Escalona seems fatal to you, and I thought your liberty might have been attempted by some other member of the family.'

Again the envoy blushed.

'There is a crusty old fellow of a cousin of the duke's, one Don Manuel de Silva, Count of Saldagna. He would have been an awkward enemy, for he is as hard-hearted as a flint, and had he seen some old ruffian ready to cut your throat, he would not have moved a finger to save you. Was he your foe?' Clifford shook his head.

It was not his feud then that was taken up by the Grand Chamberlain? Well, I am fairly at my wit's end, for the duke has but one other relative, his grand-daughter, Donna Teresa. But you

could not have offended her.'

Clifford coloured crimson from temple to chin.

'Aha! I begin to suspect,' said the Cardinal; 'Cupid, king of gods and men, has been mixing in the plot. My honoured guest has been wooing the rosebud of the house of Pacheco.'

Once more Clifford was embarrassed, but he instantly recovered

his self-possession.

- 'Your Eminence is in error,' said he, in a tone of affected gaiety.
  'Donna Teresa is the heiress of one of the first houses in Spain, and to poor hidalgos, like myself, the hearts of such are forbidden commodities.'
- 'Pshaw!' continued the Cardinal. 'There are men to whom the difficulty of success would but add zest to the attempt. Our custom-laws are, God knows, stringent enough, and yet I have heard of a dashing young fellow of a contrabandista, who in spite of king and cardinal, contrived to set all regulations at defiance, and smuggle himself into possession of silks and laces'—and he paused for an instant, and then added, in a meaning tone—' and ladies' hearts.'

Once more the young envoy blushed deeply.

'Even if it were so, your Eminence,' replied he, at length, 'such a man is little to be envied. The goods which the contrabandista carries may be valuable enough, but he possesses them only for the moment: for permanent happiness, permanent enjoyment is necessary.'

'And why,' said the Cardinal, 'should he not hope for this? We have, in Spain, bold fellows amongst our contrabandistas. I have known them make brave soldiers, and when a man has served his country well, he is entitled to the fairest reward that country can

bestow—even if it were a grandee's daughter.'

Clifford saw the allusion, but he affected not to understand it, and in a cold tone, he said—

'The Spaniards are fortunate in so generous a sovereign.'

'And so discriminating a prime minister, you should have added,' said the Cardinal, laughing;—'per Baccho, young sir, you would make but a poor diplomatist.'

'He only makes a good one, who has a heaven-born genius for

the office,' and the young soldier bowed profoundly.

'Vaya!' said Alberoni, with a loud laugh; 'that was not amiss. You are positively improving. In time,' continued he, resting strong emphasis on the words, 'I have an idea I could make a great man of you.' Again Clifford bowed.

'Any Spaniard,' said he, 'would be fortunate in the patronage of your Eminence.'

'Then, my young friend, it is a fortune they are not likely to

possess.' Clifford looked surprised.

'What causes your astonishment?' said his host. 'For success we need action—action—action. It is sufficient that in the palace, there should be the head to plan; what we want beyond it are the hands to execute. And you would seek them in vain in the Peninsula. You will find a dozen Machiavels in any street in Madrid, and more politicians at the Puerta del Sol than in all the capitals of Europe. Each has an infallible specific for securing grandeur to the monarchy, and each will overwhelm you with advice; but ask them for action, ask them to stir, move, or exert themselves, and they look at you with astonishment, light a fresh cigarito, wrap themselves in their cloaks, and once more resume their eternal babble. Solomon says "that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom,"—he should have lengthened the proverb, and added that there is not consequently success.' Clifford smiled.

'If your Eminence is to be believed,' said he, 'you are to be pitied. It is clear that the post of prime minister is a painful office. Why not resign it?' 'Ha! and so save Colonel Clifford the trouble

of taking it out of my hands.'

The young envoy bent forward in his chair, and was apparently employed heart and soul in arranging the strings at the knees of his small-clothes.

'Your Eminence,' replied he, as he recovered himself, 'quoted the Proverbs of Holy Writ. You now adopt its language. You

speak in parables.'

'Then let us have done with them,' said the Cardinal. 'You are come hither to overturn my government. It is a bold act in one so young, more especially (you recollect your look of doubt when you entered this room to-night) when you did not even know your enemy.'

'It might happen that in parties opposed to each other, such

ignorance might be mutual.'

'The arrow is well shot, but in the present case, at least, it has

not hit its mark.' Clifford smiled.

'You doubt,' said the Cardinal, laughing. 'It is not the fashion of the church to reason with infidelity; but for once it shall depart from its rules, and I will condescend to convince you. Here is your description. I received it this morning.'

As he spoke he drew from the pocket in the interior of his dress

a paper, and read as follows:-

Charles Clifford, son of Lord Clifford, and of Blanche de Zuniga. Colonel of the Life Guards of his Britannic Majesty; height five feet eleven; nose straight; hair auburn; eyes blue; is very handsome; speaks with equal fluency the Castilian and French languages; is bold, self-possessed, and shrewd. Is sent by Dubois and Lord Stanhope to overturn the government of the Cardinal, and has letters of credence to the Queen, D'Aubenton, and the Marquis Scotti. He

is supported also by the influence of the Princess of Ursins, who saw him in Paris.' 'Your Eminence is in error,' said the young soldier, interrupting him, hastily; 'I pledge you my honour I never saw the Princess of Ursins in my life.'

'Colonel Clifford is correct, and yet so is my report. It simply

says that the Princess of Ursins had seen him.'

Clifford looked at the Cardinal in dismay.

'Well, my young friend,' said he, 'what say you to my information? Your astonishment still masters you. When you have arranged your thoughts, will you favour me with the result of your reflections?' There was a pause for some time. At length Clifford's brow cleared.

'Ha!' said the Cardinal, 'I see by your eye that you have at length a distinct idea in your head, will you favour me with it?'

'I have come to the conclusion,' said his young companion, 'that—,' and he hesitated. 'That what—' continued Alberoni.

eagerly.

'That your Eminence has given me a good supper to enable my nerves to support the communication, and that now—I may prepare for Segovia.' 'Not yet,' said the Cardinal, with emphasis. 'Your going there will depend upon yourself. Now listen to me. You are a young man entering into life; and for the purpose of advancing yourself, you have engaged in a desperate enterprise—that of overturning my government. The task is an impossible one, for no task can be accomplished without means. Yours depend upon your letters of credence to three persons—all three attached friends of

my own.' Clifford smiled.

You doubt me. I would prove it. The queen, like myself, is a Parmesan. She owes to me her throne. She is bound to me still more firmly by her present and future interest; for, like myself, she hates the Spaniards, and is hated by them, and she could only keep her place against the faction of the grandees by the aid of me, her countryman. As for Scotti, the minister of Parma, he in himself is a mere cipher, a fat, bloated, eating, drinking, sensualist, tolerated for his insignificance, and, in fact, selected for it. He dare do nothing against the interest of his master, the Duke of Parma; and he in his turn owes his political existence, and that of his duchy, entirely to the aid lent him by Spain against the house of Austria. Two then of your three patrons, as you see, are—ay, and must be—my fast friends. As for the third—'

Again Clifford smiled—the quick eye of the Cardinal remarked it.

'You doubt,' continued he, the affection of the Jesuit?'

'Your Eminence, I said nothing.'

'Yes, you did—your smile spoke volumes. You doubted, I repeat, the affection of the Jesuit, and you did so because some two hours ago that blundering fool, the Grand Chamberlain, announced to the noble plotters in his banqueting-room, that, in return for the priest's elevation to the purple, he had the assurance of his support. D'Aubenton is to obtain his Cardinal's hat, but it will be from the

hands of Julio Alberoni; and the government, therefore, of Julio Alberoni will merit the approbation, and receive the support, of the confessor of his Catholic majesty Philip V.'

The Cardinal paused, as if in expectation of a reply, but none was made. The young envoy was so thoroughly stupified, that he knew not either what to say or to do. The Cardinal continued—

'You see, then, the accomplishment of your mission is hopeless. It is the duty of a brave man to persevere in his object, though he may meet with difficulties; a fool only will continue the struggle when success is impossible. But I speak to deaf ears. You make no reply.'

And what reply does your Excellency expect? The axioms that

you promulgate are incontestible. I do not dispute them.'

'You agree, then, in their truth; it is well: but the best axioms are valueless unless we apply them.'

'And therein I fail. I see not your Eminence's drift.'

'Yet it is simple. You have undertaken an impossible task. Abandon it.' Clifford looked grave.

'Do more. You find my power firmly established. Take the aid of the Colossus you cannot overthrow. Be my friend.'

The envoy shook his head.

'Nay—hear—before you decide. You are young, bold, shrewd. It is of such stuff they make great men. It is these qualities that have converted the gardener's boy of Parma into a prime minister, and the same qualities may make of Charles Clifford his right hand and his successor. And Spain is the field for their exercise. In England they will avail you nothing. There the patronage of office is limited to a few great families, and all the talents under heaven will not aid your rise, unless the head of your name can furnish Walpole with valuable political support. Here, on the contrary, is an adequate opening for your abilities.'

'I am a stranger in the land.'

'And, therefore, you are valuable. I, too, am a stranger, and can exist only by the support of those who, like myself, have no sympathy with the obsolete prejudices, and no connection with the intrigues which distinguish the present miserable descendants of a once great people. It is in men like you that I seek my strength, and you will remain here, not as my enemy, but as my friend.'

'It is impossible,' said Clifford, calmly.

'It is not only possible, but it must be,' continued the Cardinal, speaking with all the enthusiasm of his Italian nature. 'What

attaches you to England?' 'It is my country.'

'To the brave man every spot on earth is a country, and there is not one on which the sun shines more brightly than on this. But I speak not of its climate. There are weightier advantages. Hear what I can bestow. At home what are your prospects? The limited means of your family (you see I know everything) descend to your elder brother, and you may pass life unhonoured and unknown; fortunate if you be permitted to retain with it the beggarly command

of a regiment. In Spain, on the contrary, see what a career—rank, wealth, honours; for if I am well served, it is not only my wish to be liberal; it is my interest. See what I have done for Ripperda. But a few years back he came here from the Low Countries, a penniless Dutch Baron, a mere adventurer. But the fellow was bold, clever, and faithful. Behold him now. I have bestowed on him riches, position—nay, more, I gave him what some would prize more dearly, a young bride: the heiress of a great fortune, and a noble name. Is there no fair girl in Spain,' and the Cardinal's voice sank to a whisper, 'whose hand could win Charles Clifford to make it his country and his home?'

'None,' said Clifford, with calm dignity, 'if it is to be purchased with dishonour. I am, as your Eminence apparently well knows, the cadet of a poor family, and with no other inheritance but my sword; but so long as its brightness is untarnished, I am content with my lot, and I will not purchase rank or fortune even at the

expense—' and the young soldier stopped and coloured—

'Of the hand of Donna Teresa Pacheco.'

'Your Eminence is right,' said the young man, as his face became deadly pale, and he clasped convulsively with both hands the arms of his chair, 'not even at the price of the hand of Donna Teresa Pacheco!'

'It is madness, boy,' said the Cardinal, 'utter madness. But you have seen but one side of the picture. Have you courage to look at

the other?' 'Paint it. Is it death?'

'No! worse! Imprisonment for life. The fair hours of youth—the brightest period of existence—consumed within four stone walls, without the power of looking upon the outer world—secluded from its joys—its sunshine—its activity. For to a bold, energetic temperament like yours, what death is so dreadful, as perpetual and enforced repose—that hourly torture by which the energies of mind and body feed upon themselves, for lack of the natural obstacles to fame, and fortune, and success, which heaven intended them to grapple with and overcome.'

The young man groaned, and buried his face in his hands.

Alberoni had mixed the potion skilfully, and he left it to do its work. Clifford raised his face at length. It was deadly pale, and there was a tear in either eye; but its expression was calm, and the Cardinal knew at a glance that he had failed.

'No, your Eminence,' said the young soldier, as he rose to his feet and stood firmly but respectfully before his host, 'you tempt me

not.' 'And you will not accept my favours?'

'You can bestow upon me but one, for which I will be grateful, and that is, that you never renew the present subject again. I had my mission, and it has failed. I am the prisoner of your Eminence, and await your orders and my future destination.'

The Cardinal from under his heavy brows looked long and stedfastly at the young man, but the calm eye and firm mouth told him that he had no hope. He rose and bowed coldly and haughtily.

'Colonel Clifford,' said he, 'I had hoped this interview would have

terminated differently, but you have chosen your lot, and must abide

by it. I have the honour to bid you farewell.'

He left the room as he spoke. In a few minutes an officer informed Clifford that his presence was required below. The young envoy descended the staircase. A carriage was in waiting; he entered it, and the officer took his place by his side. The door was then closed; the four mules started off at a gallop, and the unfortunate representative of Lord Stanhope was on his way to Segovia.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

#### DOUBTS AND FEARS.

WE must now return to the fair granddaughter of the Duke of Escalona. It can well be imagined how intense was the terror with which she had witnessed the entrance of her grandfather and his guests. Would Clifford be discovered? If he were discovered what would be his fate? Such were some of the questions she asked of her own heart, and as the answers suggested themselves, she shivered, for she was too well acquainted with the habits of her countrymen, and their reckless disregard of bloodshed to doubt the result.

On leaving the banqueting-room, instead of joining the duenna, she betook herself to her bedchamber, which looked upon the street, and there watched with eager eyes the departure of the unwelcome visitors. At length she saw them, one by one, leave the house, and as soon as she believed that the hall below was deserted, she stole down stairs for the purpose of ascertaining if her lover, too, had

disappeared.

She found the door of the banqueting-room locked. The discovery had already taken place, and the Duke of Escalona, to prevent the escape of his prisoner, had drawn the bolt. Too terrified to ask any questions, and yet with a presentiment of evil, the young girl hurried back to her chamber; and her retreat was the more rapid, as she heard steps in the corridor, and fancied that the tread of the foot resembled that of her grandfather. Another halfhour passed in agonizing suspense, and once more she would have left the chamber with the intention of confessing the whole truth to the Duke of Escalona, but alas! she no longer possessed the power. The door was fastened on the outside. It had been the act of the Grand Chamberlain himself. On going forth to seek the black slaves, he had remarked the girl enter her apartment, anddetermined on his vengeance, and yet fearful lest the entreaties of his child might move him to clemency—he had resolved upon guarding against any such contingency, by making her a prisoner till the catastrophe was over.

This new mystery added to the poor girl's terrors. Sick at heart and half fainting, she flung herself upon a sofa, and scarce knowing what to hope or what to fear, buried her face in her hands.

From this stuper she was recalled by a shriek: and the well-

known voice of Donna Violante was heard in the corridor, demanding the instant presence of her charge.

'Anima mia,' cried the old woman, as she struggled nervously

with the lock. 'For heaven's sake, open the door!'

'I cannot; it is fastened on the outside. But what has happened?

For the love of the Virgin, tell me, and at once.'

'The duke—the duke,' screamed the duenna, but beyond this the usually voluble Italian was unable to articulate a word, for she was intensely agitated herself; the more so, as she could not help suspecting that Benedict Di Castro's presence in the gallery had something to do with the catastrophe. At length it seemed to have occurred to her that it would be safer for her own interests to leave the explanation to others; and with a view of having them made as rapidly as possible, she summoned the aid of the servants, and by their assistance the door was forced and the prisoner released. No sooner was she free than Donna Teresa hurried to the hall below, and there, for the first time, she was informed of the full extent of the calamity which had overtaken her house.

'And who, Father Jerome,' said she, addressing an old ecclesiastic, who had grown gray in the family, and was her grandfather's spiritual director and her own, 'who are arrested by the king's officers?'

'The Grand Chamberlain, my daughter, and your kinsman the

Count of Saldagna.'

- 'But there were many here;' and the conscious girl stopped and coloured deeply, and then, in a faltering tone, she added, 'Were there none else taken?'
- 'Yes, yes, my daughter,' said the old man, garrulous with age. 'It is a matter scarcely worth mentioning, in the presence of such a misfortune as that which has overtaken your worthy grandfather; but there was also seized a young man—a hidalgo apparently.'

The girl clasped her hands with an exclamation of thankfulness, and then added, hurriedly, 'And what, Father Jerome, became of him?' 'It matters little what became of him. The thing that

puzzles me most is, that no one can even guess who he was.'

'But he was taken, you say?' 'Yes; and in the banquetingroom, along with the Grand Chamberlain and Don Manuel; and it is thought he must have committed some great offence, for they had stripped him, and Hassan and Muley had been summoned; and you know the blacks are never in attendance, save when the Grand Chamberlain is about to use the cord or the axe.'

The poor girl staggered against the wall, and for a minute was

speechless with agitation.

'But he is safe?' muttered she, faintly, at length.

'Yes, yes, the Grand Chamberlain is safe; that is, as safe as any one can be said to be in the hands of the king's gendar-

merie. He must by this time be half way to Segovia.'

'But the young man, Father Jerome?' 'Nay, I know not what became of him,' said the worthy priest, in a tone of indifference, that contrasted strangely with the feelings of his com-

panion. The reply seemed ominous, and the young girl once more leaned for support against the wall.

'But they did no harm to the prisoner?' muttered she, at length.

- 'Harm, indeed!' replied the worthy ecclesiastic, in an indignant tone. 'They dare not. The duke is a grandee of the first class, and nothing but the Council of Castile has a right to lay sword on one of his rank.'
- 'But the young man, Father Jerome,' said Therese, crimsoning to the temples, 'did they him any injury?' 'Oh, the hidalgo; I had forgotten him. Injury did you say? No, indeed; and that is the most puzzling part of the matter. That godless Flemish boor, with manners only fit for a pot-house, Baron Zerclas, the captain of the Walloon Guard, why he pays the young fellow as much respect as if he were an Infante of Spain. "Ho! the major-domo of the duke," shouts he, on one side. "Ho! his excellency's gentlemen of the chamber," halloos he, on the other. "What! no attendance for the king's lieutenant? Parade me instantly, four pages with waxlights." With that, he marches my young gentleman to his excellency's own tiring-room, has him dressed as carefully as if he were preparing him for the Chamber of Mirrors on an audience of the queen; and then——'

'And then—holy father;—but never mind his dress—what did he do with him?' 'Ah, that, my daughter,' said the old priest, shaking his head mysteriously, 'is what no one can even guess.' 'Perhaps,' said Therese, timidly, 'they took him also to Segovia?'

'Perhaps,' said Therese, timidly, 'they took him also to Segovia?' 'Him to Segovia!' said the worthy priest, in unutterable astonishment; 'a lad—a nobody—a Don Fulano! My dear child, you forget yourself strangely. A lodging in the castle of Segovia is an honour reserved only for grandees. The state prison would be degraded for ever if it were forced to receive within its walls a mere hidalgo.'

The young girl asked no more questions, and returned to her

chamber, there to meditate upon the past and future.

Her first thoughts were of Clifford. The young soldier had fixed himself firmly in her heart. His graceful person, his high bearing, his gallantry at the Somo Sierra, all contributed to give him a place in her affection; but what perhaps had not been the least influential in producing this result was that she looked upon herself as in some degree the cause of his present misfortunes. There were, no doubt, other reasons for the sudden liking. They will be detailed hereafter; but it is hoped that those already stated will suffice for poor Therese's excuse. She loved—and it was therefore with the most absorbing interest that she had listened to the details of the old ecclesiastic.

The information which she had elicited was on the whole favourable. Her lover's life was, at least for the moment, safe. It was true that his present fortunes and future fate were involved in mystery, but still he was in the hands of the king's officers, and the attention paid him (great enough as it had been to excite the astonishment of Father Jerome), was proof at least of no very violent

enmity. Even if, as Donna Teresa feared, his diplomatic character had been discovered, it was little probable that Alberoni would venture to offer injury to the representative of a powerful kingdom. A mere imprisonment, however tedious might be its hours to her lover, did not produce in the fair visionary any special

feelings of anxiety.

Clifford's future fortunes being thus satisfactorily disposed of, the young lady turned her thoughts to her grandfather. Her first act, as the idea of the old man rose before her mind's eye, was to blush deeply that he had not been sooner the object of her interest. His fate and probable future were more puzzling. What the crime of the duke was, she did not know, but she knew enough to alarm her. She had long been in the secret of her grandfather's hatred to the Cardinal, and she suspected that the large body of nobles whom she had that day seen in the banqueting-room, had not been summoned there without a definite object. With the appearance of many of them she was unacquainted, but those whom she did know were, she was well aware, distinguished for their animosity to the prime minister.

These suspicions received of course additional strength from the result. To arrest a grandee of the first class was a matter which even the sovereign dared scarcely venture on. The boldness of the step satisfied her, that it would not have been taken unless Alberoni had evidence in his hands sufficient to support him against the odium, which would be the natural result of the imprisonment of a

noble so distinguished as the grand chamberlain.

The affair, however, was over; it was useless to speculate on its causes. All that human wisdom could do was to repair the evil,—if to repair it were possible. But to do so efficiently, it was necessary to be acquainted with the facts of the case, and these could only be obtained from her grandfather himself. To him, therefore,

the young heiress determined to repair.

The idea was carried out without delay. On the following morning two carriages were at the door of the palace of Escalona —the leading mules of each rejoicing in those silk traces, six yards long, which formed one of the most highly-prized privileges of the grandees; and the possession of which was the object of many a jealous aspiration on the part of the wives of the Jew bankers and the rich citizens. Each vehicle was in shape somewhat like the penny toys, which the older of the present generation may recollect seeing in their childhood, and which were formed on the model of the coach of these times. The bottom was very narrow, the top very broad, and projecting a good half foot beyond the four sides. each the exact counterpart of the other in its shape and flat formal outline. The vehicles had a coach-box in front, similar to that used now-a-days for supporting a hammer-cloth, but without its drapery. It was only, however, used for show, as since the days of the Count-Duke it had never been occupied. Olivarez had imparted to a friend by his side a great political secret, which had been overheard and revealed by the coachman. The indiscreet Jehu had in consequence been dismounted from his box and converted into a postilion. Fashions follow prime ministers when prime ministers are more powerful than kings; and the grandees having no secrets to communicate, conducted themselves, as if each word that fell from their lips was that of a secretary of state. In a week there was not a nobleman with a coachman in all Madrid. The citizens, with two mules to their carriage, acted with the same energy as those who possessed four,—and postilions became the law of Spain.

In the first of the two vehicles went Donna Teresa and Father Jerome. Into the capacious interior of the second were crowded her two waiting maids, two gentlemen ushers, and four pages. The duenna was left behind. Words had dropped at intervals from the conscience-stricken and somewhat hysterical Donna Violante, which suggested to her ward, a doubt alike of the Neapolitan's fidelity, and of her ignorance of the true cause of the calamity which had overtaken the house of Escalona. By nightfall the journey had been safely

performed, and the girl was in the arms of her grandfather.

The old man welcomed her with overflowing affection. It might be that for the moment he had forgotten the stranger in the banqueting-room. It might be that solitude and misfortune had softened his heart. Whatever was the cause, her reception was to the last degree kind. In the course of the long evening, the duke detailed to his fair descendant what had taken place at the meeting of the nobles. It was only towards the close of his narrative, and when Donna Teresa had asked him if he could guess by whom he had been betrayed, that the Grand Chamberlain exhibited irritation, for the vision of his unbidden visitor rose to his memory. But uncertain in what light to view him, whether as the revealer of the plot, or the lover of his grandchild, he drew himself up coldly, and said nothing in reply.

For an instant his young relative seemed to share his embarrassment, for she, too, coloured deeply, and then became deadly pale. Immediately after, however, her brow cleared, and as if she had

adopted some sudden resolution, in a hurried voice, she said.

'You do not answer my question, my dear grandfather? You conceal something from me?' The old man was still silent.

'You found some one behind the tapestry,' said Therese, in a slightly agitated tone. 'You suspect him of having betrayed your plans. You are deceived. He was no traitor!' The duke smiled bitterly.

'You doubt me,' continued Therese: 'I would warrant his

honour with my life.'

'And who,' said the old noble, coldly, 'is the cavalier for whom Donna Teresa Pacheco thus pledges herself?' 'Colonel Clifford, the English envoy.'

'A young man of whom you know nothing.' 'One, on the contrary, of whom I know much; to whom I owe everything; who rescued me from ruffians, who saved my life, and more than my life, at the Somo Sierra!'

'To render such service to a daughter of the house of Pacheco is honour enough for a low-born vassal.' 'He is none such. His

family is as noble as our own.'

'Pshaw, girl!' said the old grandee, pettishly. 'There is no blue blood out of Spain. A stranger has imposed on you.' 'He has not deceived me. Yet, if only Castilian descent can give nobility, he has it, and from the same source as ourselves.'

The duke looked in astonishment. 'You speak unintelligibly, my child,' said he. 'Then I will explain. His mother was a Zuniga—Blanche de Zuniga, the sister of the Duke of Bejar, and the stranger, as you call him, is your cousin and mine!'

Her grandfather threw himself back in his chair, and looked at

her in astonishment. There was a long pause.

'And this,' said he, at length, speaking in a low tone, and as if to himself; 'this was the reason—this instinct of blood—that moved me towards the lad, even when I thought that I had the best causes for anger! And now I can understand what he meant when he said that I should wish that I had cut off my right hand rather than have done what I was about to do yesterday. Yet, why did he not tell me all this?' 'It was impossible. His instructions tied him down to communicate with only three persons.'

'And he preferred to die rather than disobey his orders. It was well done, and worthy of the blood of Zuniga; but why did you not inform me that the boy was of the same race as my sainted mother?' 'You would not permit me. You may recollect when I communicated to you, on the day of my return, the refusal of the Princess of Ursins to re-enter Spain, and stated that she had sent in her place a young Englishman, as her representative, to assist in the downfall of Alberoni, you refused at once to listen to the subject.'

'And upon good grounds,' said the old man. 'I held that the removal of the Cardinal, if effected by Spaniards, was but the exercise of a just right; if I had admitted the representative of two foreign and lately hostile nations to enter into the plot, it assumed at once

the character of treason.'

'I do not impeach your reasons, my dear grandfather; I simply show you why I was silent.' 'Well, I dispute not, that at the time, you had sufficient ground for not returning to the subject, but yesterday, when you anticipated his discovery,' and the old man hesitated for a moment, 'and must have probably guessed at the result, why did you not inform me of the whole truth?"

'I should have done so, but I had no longer the power. My door

was locked.'

'Ah!' said the conscience-stricken grandee. 'Oh, blessed Virgin!' continued he, as he clasped his hands and bent his head devoutly, 'from how much misery hast thou saved me! And where,' said he, after awhile, 'is the young man now?' 'That,' replied Donna Teresa, 'I cannot tell, and from what I have heard I cannot even guess;' and she then detailed the mysterious communication which she had received from Father Jerome.

'Doubtless, another plot of the Parmesan,' said the duke, with a smile; 'but I shall probably soon learn. You are aware,' continued he, 'that Don Juan Sanchez, the governor of the castle, is an old friend of ours. He was the captain of my guard when I was viceroy at Naples, and for the sake of times gone by, does not pull too tight the reins of discipline. More especially,' he added, with a smile, 'as he possibly suspects that the sun may one day be on my side of the wall. Let us see what he says to it.'

He summoned a servant as he spoke, and through him requested the presence of the alcayde; and in obedience to the requisition,

that official entered the room.

'Well, Don Juan,' said the duke, pointing to his granddaughter, 'here is another acquaintance of yours. She has somewhat grown since you saw her playing with her doll in the Chiaja; but I would ask a favour of you.' 'If it is not against the rules,' said the governor, with a smile, 'I need hardly say what pleasure I shall have in according it.'

'Nay, there is no treason in it, Sanchez,' said the Grand Chamberlain; 'what I would learn is this. There was a young man arrested yesterday in my house at the same time with Saldagna and myself. Can you tell me what has become of him?' Is it, replied Don Juan, 'a young Englishman, who, they whisper, was sent by

Dubois to trip up the heels of his Eminence?"

'The very man,' said the duke. 'Then I am able to give your excellency the latest intelligence. He arrived here at four o'clock

this morning.'

'A prisoner?' 'Alas, my lord,' said the alcayde, laughing, 'I fear I have but few voluntary guests. He is quartered in the room overhead; and if,—for I have no orders to the contrary,—it would be any pleasure to the Grand Chamberlain, I shall be happy to introduce him here.' Therese coloured deeply. The duke saw his granddaughter's embarrassment, and hastened to relieve it.

'Not at present, Sanchez,' said he, hastily; 'not at present. Our calamity is too recent, and too great, to admit, as yet, of visitors.'

Juan Sanchez withdrew. A long conversation then took place between the duke and his grandchild. The result of it was that the young heiress should return to Madrid, and seek for her grandfather an audience of the king.

'I must see him,' said the old man. 'Philip is just. His toocasy temper may occasionally lead him into error, but if he could learn that our plot was directed, not against himself, but against his minister, he would not leave an old and faithful servant to rot

in a dungeon.'

In accordance with this, on the following morning, at an early hour, Donna Teresa retraced her steps to the capital, with the view of devising some means for introducing the head of the house of Pacheco to the presence of the man, who, in common parlance, was the Monarch of Spain: but who might have been more justly described as the Prisoner of the palace of Madrid.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

#### LA ROCHE.

Among the celebrities of the Spanish court at the time of which we write, there are few better known in the pages of St. Simon than La Roche, the premier valet de chambre, or, as we would express it at the present day, first gentleman of the bedchamber to Philip V.;

Kings are human beings. They have, perhaps, even in a greater degree than their fellows (for they are less compelled to restrain them), the passions and the weaknesses of humanity. Of these, be it a passion or a weakness, there are few feelings in the human heart more universal than a desire for sympathy. What so delightful as to find one who joys in our joy, and sorrows in our sorrow; whose hopes, and wishes, and fears, are but a reflection of our own; and what more natural than to seek such a person in a dependent? Our superiors and our equals may be our friends, and attached ones; but their sympathies must be limited; for they too have hopes and fears personal to themselves, which naturally and necessarily occupy their attention; and in the proportion in which it is so occupied, diminish the thought of mind and energy of body, which can be devoted to interests external of them.

With dependents it is, or at least was, different. Their position in the early part of the eighteenth century—when the upper and lower grades of society were less equalized than at present—took its entire colouring from that of their master. His fortune was their fortune; his rise their success; his fall their ruin.

The feudal system did much to strengthen this state of things, for it divided a kingdom into ten thousand little sovereignties, the members of which reserved their affections for their own clan and locality, and looked upon all and everything beyond them as strangers and alien to themselves. The feeling that animated the subordinates, was shared with equal intensity by their chief. Without the limits of his domain, affection was doubtful; while envy, hatred, malice, and even open and decided hostility, might be considered probable, if not certain. His interest, therefore, forced him to look for friends at home. There only he found sympathy, but there also he found only dependents; and thus the bosom counsellor of the great lord was, with scarce an exception, an inferior.

The necessity of the feudal noble was still more that of the sovereign. His powers and wishes were thwarted both from without and from within; by his brother monarchs, but not less so by his great vassals and great churchmen. He was forced thus to limit still further the circle from which was to be selected his ally of the heart, and to confine the choice not merely to members of his own family, but to those of his domestics, whose low rank excited no jealousy in the higher classes; and whose office, by giving the right and the facility of constant approach, made communication easy.

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Such were the reasons, too little understood, which gave to the Court Fools, Triboulet and Chicot, the friendship of two powerful kings, Francis I. and Henry III.; and such also was the cause of the

influence exercised by his attendant over Philip V.

Yet La Roche had an advantage possessed by few of those favoured with the personal friendship of royalty. He was well born. The cadet of a noble family, which in its junior branches had fallen into extreme poverty, he had been selected by Louis XIV. about a year prior to the accession of his grandson to the Spanish throne, as first gentleman of the bedchamber to the future sovereign. The choice had been made on the recommendation of the Prince de Chalais, with some members of whose family La Roche was distantly connected. The prince had spoken in the highest terms to the old king of the valuable qualities of his protégé, and the premier valet had in the sequel fully justified the recommendation.

At the period of attaining his unexpected royalty Philip was but seventeen; his attendant ten years older. The latter had been well educated—was, like all the scions of the nobility in France, intimate with the public and private history of her great families—was thoroughly versed in the gossip of the Oeil de bœuf, and acquainted with the appearance, at least, of every one of either sex that was distinguished at the court of France. Such stores of knowledge, and of the sort most valued by the young, aided by a talent for narrating of the very first order, soon gave him great influence over Philip.

La Roche did not abuse it. He had no ambition. He cared nothing for honours or money; had no passion for mixing himself up with political affairs, and had virtue, or it might be indifference enough, to refuse the numerous bribes, which, on his first arrival in Spain, were offered him by dignitaries of church and state as the price of

his recommending them to his master.

These temptations, and the resistance to them, from time to time came to Philip's ear, and they naturally strengthened his attachment to his attendant-an attachment which upon other grounds was already great. Shy, timid, retiring, the young monarch hated new faces, or the appearance of any before whom it was necessary to support the burden of etiquette. Public levees, public processions. and state councils, are the necessary duties of all sovereigns, and the pleasure of many. In Philip they produced only disgust, and he hurried from them to return to his cabinet, as his private room was termed, there to talk to La Roche of dear France, the fairy land of his imagination, and of French men and French women, and hunting parties in the forest of St. Germains, and picnics in the gardens of Ah! these were happy hours. La Roche was in name, at least, but a valet-de-chambre; but there were moments, after some such conferences, when he could have put to rout the united influences of the three great tyrants of poor Philip's existence—his prime minister, his confessor, and his queen.

These circumstances were notorious to the court world of Madrid,

and were, of course, well known to the fair granddaughter of the Duke of Escalona. And upon these she founded her hopes. La Roche, it has been mentioned, had been indebted for his post to the Prince de Chalais, the uncle of the young heiress. He had always felt grateful for the kindness, and had often in private, when the opportunity occurred, expressed his gratitude. To him, then, Donna Teresa determined to have recourse in her difficulty. He had the reputation of being shrewd and prudent. It would be difficult to find a more able—it would be impossible to meet with a more honest or more disinterested adviser.

The young lady had left Segovia at sunrise on the morning which had followed her interview with her grandfather, and had arrived in Madrid an hour before mid-day. She immediately despatched a confidential messenger to the palace, requesting the presence of the premier valet-de-chambre of the king. The summons was speedily attended to, for about an hour after noon La Roche made his

appearance.

He was a little swarthy man, of about six-and-forty, with an ensemble which at the first glance bespoke the man of the world the satirical mouth; the bright, observant, but laughing eye; the manners to the last degree polished without being obsequious; the bow profound, and yet easy. He was dressed as a man dresses who has once been very handsome, and is still anxious to conceal by care the approach of years. The green velvet coat, with its large cuffs and pockets richly embroidered with gold; the cravat of Mechlin lace, with ruffles on the breast and wrists of the same material; the full-bottomed wig, perfuming at every motion of the head the ambient air, and with each ringlet as perfect as if it had but just escaped from the hands of the friseur; the long silk stockings drawn over the knees of the small clothes, and coming half way up the thigh; the high, square-toed, gold-buckled shoes; the cut-steelhandled sword; the three-cornered hat, and 'the nice conduct of the clouded cane,'—all marked him as the beau of a period when beaux in silks, and velvets, and jewellery, were worth looking at.

'Good morning, Donna Teresa Pacheco,' said he, on entering, 'or rather, if you will permit me to call you so, Mademoiselle de Chalais. To my French ears it is the prettier designation of the two. And how beautiful you look! How charming! One might see at a glance that you had just come from Paris. Nothing but Versailles could give that air. It is now, let me see, just three-and-twenty years since I first saw the late Madame la Comtesse, your excellent mother. She was then Mademoiselle de Chalais, the first star in that galaxy of beauty which illuminated the court of the Grand Monarque. You, Mademoiselle Therese, are positively as enchanting. Ah! what conquests you must have made! How

many hearts you must have broken!'

'Stop, stop,' said the young girl, laughing, 'whatever be the brilliancy of Versailles, Monsieur La Roche, it is plain enough that

it is not necessary for a "belle dame" to go there to hear fine things said to her. I assure you I have had more compliments paid to me within the last five minutes than during my whole year of absence. And yet,' continued she, as her face resumed its gravity, 'you will forgive me for saying that there never was a moment when I was able to appreciate them less. You have, no doubt, heard of our misfortune.'

La Roche's features at once lost their gaiety, and he bowed. The courtesy, however, was clearly not dictated by mere court etiquette. It was low, but it was also expressive of deep sympathy.

'My grandfather,' resumed the young girl, 'has been arrested for

high treason; but the charge is unfounded.'

'By whom is it made?' 'You must know well, Monsieur La

Roche. By the Cardinal.'

'What I know, Mademoiselle Therese,' said he, with a quiet smile, 'is at present of no moment. What is now of importance is your knowledge, not mine. Alberoni, you tell me, has made the charge. Upon what evidence?' 'That, as yet, I have not learned.'

'And you have applied to me,' said he with an interrogative

smile, 'to learn for you?'

'Not exactly. And yet it is to seek your aid that I sent for you.

Will you lend it me?

'Mademoiselle,' said he, 'you know how much I have been indebted to your family. To them I owe entirely my present position, and what little influence I possess, and I need not say how happy it would make me to do what I can to repay their kindness. But to enable me to do so with effect, I must have nothing concealed from me.' Therese looked embarrassed.

'Nothing, I repeat. Alberoni has charged the Grand Chamber-

lain with treason.'

'The loyalty of my grandfather,' said the young girl, hastily, 'is well known. It has been proved a thousand times, and a long-proved loyalty is a sufficient answer to such an accusation.'

'Pardon me. To you, to me, my dear Mademoiselle de Chalais, such answer may be sufficient; but it will not satisfy the nation.

Worst of all, it will not satisfy the king.'

'Not after the sacrifices that the duke has made for him?'

'The sacrifices are past. The danger is said to be present, and Philip is suspicious. I repeat, Alberoni has made a charge. He must have grounds for it. They may be small—they may be insignificant; but, to a certain extent, they must exist.'

'There are none, I say.'

- 'There are some, I repeat again. The prime minister has arrested a grandee of the first class. He dared not have done so unless he had had some warrant for so bold an act.'
- 'Oh! Monsieur La Roche, I assure you there is no sufficient warrant. But you abandon me like all the rest. You would leave a falling house.'

'You are wrong, Mademoiselle Therese,' said her companion.

'It is because I would not leave a falling house that I say so. But after all it is a mere difference of opinion. You think there is no excuse for the Cardinal's conduct. I think there may be. It is possible that I may be wrong; but before I can be convinced of my error, I must know all the facts.'

Once more Therese looked distressed.

'Nay, my dear young lady,' said her companion. 'this is no time for mystery,-nor am I the person with whom you should affect it. You know I am much attached to your mother's family, to yourself, to all your connections, and you believe me-though I make little protestation of it. You believe me. I sav.' Therese bowed.

'Prove that belief by answering my questions. There was a meeting of grandees at the palace of Escalona?'

Again the fair girl made a sign of assent.

'Now comes the real gist of the matter. At that meeting treason was spoken?' 'Not by my grandfather,' said Therese hastily.

'I was right then. It was spoken by some one. Some person present, in short, proposed to renew the scheme of last year, which failed in the hands of the Dukes of Veraguas and Las Torres—a scheme for seizing the king. Who was that person?'

The young girl was silent as if in thought.

La Roche did not interrupt her meditations. He put his hat and cane upon the floor, drew from his capacious pocket a large richlychased gold snuff-box, opened it, and three several times refreshed either nostril with a copious pinch. His patience at length appeared exhausted.

'My dear young lady,' said he, 'this is idle. I must know the name of that person.' 'And for what end?'

'To aid your grandfather. If there be treason, let the traitor answer it. Why should the innocent suffer for the guilty?"

'You would denounce him to the king?' 'Assuredly.'

'Then shall I not denounce him to you.'

'Your grandfather's life may depend upon it,' said the premier valet, coldly, and again he had recourse to his snuff-box.

Therese looked at him for some minutes earnestly, and then, as

the truth dawned on her, she burst into tears.

'These are cruel words, Monsieur La Roche,' said she at length, but they do not move me. To save my grandfather, I would sacrifice. God knows how willingly, everything, even life itself. But I will not sacrifice honour, nor would the Duke of Escalona accept of safety purchased on such terms. The name I may not tell, and will not tell: but I will reveal this much, that if there were a suggestion made to seize upon the person of the king, the Duke of Escalona had no share in it.'

'And what,' said La Roche, coldly, 'what was the object of the Grand Chamberlain being present at a meeting at which you confess, by implication, treason was mooted; a meeting, moreover, which, as it was held in his own house, must have been summoned by

the Duke of Escalona himself?'

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'That I will answer without reserve. It was to overturn the

power of Alberoni.

The premier valet again rapped his box, and took snuff repeatedly. as if to convey the idea that he did not conceive that the story had much improved by the change in the version.

'You do not think there was anything wrong in this, Monsieur

La Roche?' said his companion, anxiously.

La Roche shook his head.

'Alberoni,' said the young girl, 'is like my father, but a subject 'He is its prime minister.' of Spain.'

'You do not think it wrong to oppose a prime minister?'

'The question is not, what is my opinion, but what is the king's.'

'He cannot think it wrong.' 'Philip is like his grandfather. He is apt to consider disaffection to his minister as disaffection to himself.'

'It is an error. It is a monstrous error. He must be disabused 'To do so would be beyond my power. You furnish me

with no facts. You have tied my tongue.

'True—true— nor do I ask it of you. There are facts—but it is only the duke himself who is able to decide how much or how little of them is fit for the king's ear.' 'The Grand Chamberlain,' said

the premier valet, coldly, 'is at Segovia.'

'But he need not remain there. You can obtain an order for his being brought to Madrid. You will get him an interview with the 'Impossible, my dear young lady,' said her companion. 'The attempt would ruin myself without benefiting you. I should be deprived of my post ere I were a day older.'

'Alas! alas!' cried the girl, clasping her hands in despair, and again bursting into tears. 'You abandon me! Everybody abandons me. Ah, Monsieur La Roche! is this the end of all the affec-

tion you pretended to my house?'

The premier valet once more applied himself to his box, and snuffed with great energy. Suddenly he gave a slight start. An

idea had apparently suggested itself.

'My dear young lady,' said he, 'I cannot solicit an interview for your father. Yet there is a person who may, if she will, and, I doubt not, with success.' 'Ōh! Monsieur La Roche, dear Monsieur La Roche,' said the girl, clasping her hands, while her eyes sparkled with delight, 'who is that person? She must—she will do me this favour, for I shall beg it on my knees.'

'The party is not far off,' said the first gentleman of the bed-

chamber, with a quiet smile. 'It is Donna Teresa Pacheco.' 'I?' 'You.' Teresa appeared profoundly agitated, and for some time mused deeply.

'It is impossible,' said she. 'I could not do anything so unmaidenly as ask a private interview with the king.'

'Not to save the life of your grandfather?'

The girl looked at her companion, as if stupified, grasping convulsively the arms of her chair, and the tears streaming down her cheeks. She raised her head at length, and as her eyes met the keen, searching glance of her companion, she flushed crimson from

temple to shoulder.

'Oh! Monsieur La Roche,' said she, 'I need not tell you my feelings; I see you read them. Advise me, guide me. Is it not wrong?

Is it not dangerous?'

La Roche rose. He approached his fair hostess, and took her hand, but with great respect. 'My dear child,' said he, 'I will tell you now what I have never hinted to human ear. I loved your mother. I, a poor gentleman, dared to love Adéle de Chalais. But the meanest thing that crawls upon earth may look at the sun, and I, while I gazed at her in all the glory of her rank and beauty, forgot my own obscurity. She never knew of my affection; never dreamt of it. How could she, the rich and high-born girl, suspect that Martin La Roche had dared to worship her? She married another. It mattered not. For her sake I loved. I love her child. And to that child I would give no counsel that would not be given by a father. I will procure for you an interview with the king, and have no fears, my daughter, for I will be at the door. I will listen to every word that is uttered, and be ready to aid if there be danger. But there is none. Had Philip been like the other princes of his house. I would not have counselled it. But in such matters, at least, he is sinless. Have no fears then. Go. Plead your grandfather's cause, and if your entreaties fail, plead boldly, for Philip is a child that ever obeys the strong will.'

'You advise me to go then?' said Therese, doubtfully.

'I do. And I pledge myself for your safety.'

'And when will be the interview?'

'That depends on circunstances. But at six to-night, be ready. It is the hour of the queen's supper—and her majesty ever sups alone. The king loves not to see her eat, for he, in his fastidiousness, fancies that ruby lips should be fed upon air, while her majesty, on the contrary, if the viands be good, would play the trencherman with any muleteer in Spain. But of the time I will inform you hereafter, and recollect, dress yourself in the costume of Versailles; for the king has a soft heart towards France, and the best arguments you could utter would not weigh with him so much as a bit of Paris millinery.'

And the heiress of the house of Pacheco and her new-found

adviser parted.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PHILIP V.

WE must once more change the scene to the palace. We have already mentioned that the royal edifice was divided in the interior into two court-yards. That on the left was appropriated to the residence of the royal family, and all around it was a piazza or colonnade, from the centre of which a broad double staircase led to

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the first floor. At the top this opened into a long gallery, called the Gallery of Pictures. It was the waiting-room for the nobility, and through it persons seeking an audience were conducted to the

king, whose apartment was at the further end of it.

The Cabinet, as this was called, was a room of great size, and furnished with a brilliancy of decoration that still lives in history. The walls were hung with paintings of the Italian and Spanish schools in such profusion that little of the velvet behind them was discernible. All were works of great masters, but there was one, a chefd'œuvre of Titian, that occupied the place of honour, and most riveted attention. It represented the toilette of a beautiful woman, allegorically painted as Venus. The feet, the arms, and the bust were without clothing, while the golden hair, unfettered by band or comb, fell in graceful profusion upon the neck and shoulders. Around, with assiduous zeal, fluttered the attendant Cupids, some fastening her sandals, some wreathing flowers in her hair; while others held a mirror in air to enable the divinity to judge of the success of the efforts of their companions. The frame was of solid silver, deeply chased, and gilt at intervals, so as to add to its richness. It was the portrait of the Princess of Eboli, the favourite of Philip II.

The rest of the furniture blazed forth in all the magnificence of the Louis Quatorze style. The carpet was from the Gobelins; the mirrors from Venice; the hangings and drapery were of crimson velvet; the chairs and sofas massive, high-backed, carved, and gilt; the cabinets, marqueterie or ormolu; the panels of the window-shutters filled with landscapes from the pictures of Watteau. A fire-place had also been added by its present occupant, and instead of the eternal brazier, some logs blazed cheerfully on the hearth. One other addition had been suggested by the devotion, or, as some called it, the bigotry of the king. In a corner stood a small altar, having above it, in gold, a richly-sculptured representation of Christ on the cross, on either side of which, though it was scarce two hours

past mid-day, burned a wax taper.

It is to this room we are now to conduct the reader. In front of the fire, buried in the recesses of a large arm-chair, sat a man, apparently about thirty, though, as the wind had never been permitted to visit his cheek too roughly, it is probable that five or six years might have been safely added to the reckoning. The face was of even feminine beauty. The lofty forehead, the arched and delicately-traced eyebrow, the large blue and sleepy eye, the chiselled nostril, and the mouth, were each and all specimens of nature's happiest handiwork. The chin only was cast in a coarser mould; it was round, full, and somewhat heavy, indicating, according to Lavater, a sensual temperament. The rest of the person was in no degree inferior to the features in the grace of its outlines. The hands were long, small, and delicate, the chest rounded, the waist taper, the limbs well formed.

The solitary occupant of the chamber was dressed richly, but without display, in a coat and small-clothes of black velvet, and wore a

full-bottomed wig of auburn-coloured hair. On his left breast was a diamond star, and across his right shoulder a broad embroidered sword-belt, while the jewelled rapier that belonged to it lay on a table near him. His costume, in short, was that of a French gentleman of the day. In one particular only, and that an important one, it possessed a feature of its own. Around the throat, instead of the usual long cravat of rich Mechlin lace, was a stiff black stock, surmounted at top by two small white bands, similar to those worn by our clergy. This neck-covering was called 'the Golilla,' and was in Spain the necessary appendage of royalty, probably no agreeable one, as its stiffness and height must have affected the jaws of the wearer as unpleasantly as a black military stock does those of a new-caught militia man in the first week of his drill.

It was Philip V., King of Spain and the Indies.

Seldom has a more contemptible sovereign filled a throne. Yet something might be alleged in excuse. The Duke of Anjou, as he was termed in his youth, was naturally proud and ambitious, of considerable ability, and with great powers of observation; but these, his better qualities, had been nipped in the blossom by the jealous character of his grandfather's court, where the princes of the blood were carefully kept uneducated and in the background, lest by their talents or their presence they might dim that halo of glory which was supposed to encircle the Grand Monarque. Thus debarred by state policy from thinking and acting, Philip gradually lost alike the power and the will to think or to act; and concentrated the little energy which remained to him in a passionate attachment to the beautiful grounds and hunting forests which surrounded his royal prison—to the limited circle which was permitted to share it with him—and, most of all, to the tittle-tattle, to the minute scandals, the paltry jealousies which formed the staple subject of that circle's interest and conversation. Such tastes and habits, combined as they were with the consciousness of high rank and a lingering nobility of thought, formed a strange medley, and produced a character not altogether dissimilar to that of our own James I. It was one that augured ill for dignity or happiness; but the youthful Bourbon, in addition to weaknesses the result of education, had constitutional foibles which made his lot even more pitiable than that of the Stuart. He had inherited the singular mixture of love and devotion which characterized his grandfather. Yet Philip had neither a La Vallière nor a Montespan. On the contrary he was really and rigidly faithful to the queen; it was merely in imagination that he was inconstant to her. The aberrations, mental only though they were, were as severely punished as if they had been realities: for while the fervent temperament of the would-be Lothario made him regard every daughter of Eve as a Venus, his still more fervent bigotry whispered in his ear, ere the flitting emotion were well passed, that it was a deadly sin, which perilled the salvation of his soul, and could be atoned only by instant and heartrending contrition. Thus the poor king passed life, the victim of antagonistic PHILIP V. 185

influences—ever vibrating, as his feeble spirit felt the alternate attraction between ambition and indolence—between a jealousy of respect and a passion for gossip—between woman and a crucifix—

love and prayer.

At the moment at which we first present him to our readers, his Majesty seemed in no amiable mood, for he yawned repeatedly, stretched out first one limb to the fire, and then another, and from time to time changed his position in the chair, as if he had discovered something like hardness in its downy cushions.

'What can have become of La Roche?' said he to himself. 'He has been away these two hours, and yet the rascal knows that I require somebody to amuse me. What can have become of him?

Where can he be gone?'

Suddenly the king's face brightened, for a step was heard in the gallery. It was followed by a gentle tap at the door, and on permission being given, La Roche entered.

'Ah, it is you at last, La Roche,' said the king. 'How dare you, Sir, be so long absent, and without my permission?' 'I believed

that your Majesty would be taking the siesta, and asleep.'

'Pshaw! you know I detest the siesta, and everything Spanish. And to be absent when I was so much in need of you; when I had such absolute necessity for your presence.'

'May I ask,' said his attendant, 'what has gone wrong?'

'My health, La Roche; my health is breaking fast;' and the young king once more sank back in his chair with the exhausted air of one whose last hour was come.

'It gives me the most poignant distress to hear it,' said his attendant; 'but will your Majesty permit me to say that it could scarcely

have been injured by my absence?'

'My majesty will permit you to say nothing of the sort. health was injured by your absence. Is not the body affected by the mind? Answer me that—and if it be true, would not my sufferings for the last two hours have been less if you had been here, as you ought to have been, to amuse me? This is a miserable monarchy, this monarchy of Spain! and yet it had once some sensible things about it. Olivarez and the Cardinal Duke used to employ spies in every part of Madrid for the purpose of collecting all the amusing stories of the capital, and with the cream of these did they chase away the tedium of my royal predecessors and namesakes, Philip III. and Philip IV. Ah! in these days kings had true friends. How the world is changed!' And the young monarch raised his half-sleeping eyes and gazed at his valet with a look of reproach. But the exertion seemed too much for him, for once more the eyes drooped, and the exhausted hypochondriac, with a slight groan, again sank back into a corner of his chair.

The nobles of whom your Majesty speaks were ministers of state,'

replied La Roche, 'I am only a valet-de-chambre.'

The more reason for you to be ashamed of yourself. Ministers of state have a world of things to do. They must hold audiences

and give orders—aye, and write despatches too—God help them! I find the mere signing them exhausting enough—and a thousand other matters beside. But you, sir, what on earth have you got to do, but to amuse me?"

La Roche bowed profoundly, and with the air of a man who sees

his fault and acknowledges it.

'Well, you are contrite, I see; I will pass it over for once. And now you have been abroad—gossipping, no doubt, and hearing all the news. Come, tell me everything; and the young king's eyes raised themselves for a moment with a look of interest and curiosity.

'I have, your Majesty-I have heard news-and they are of the

most astounding and painful nature.'

'Then don't tell me them, La Roche,' said the king, raising himself with sudden energy. 'Nay,' said he, as he saw from his attendant's face that the unwelcome information was to be pressed on him, 'I will not hear them, man. I cannot. My nerves will not stand it. I am melancholy enough already.'

The discomfited valet-de-chambre bowed, and for a minute there was silence. The curiosity of the young monarch once more roused

him to activity.

'But you must have seen something amusing, La Roche—you must have been at the Puerta del Sol. What were they saying at the wine-shops? What was doing at the Great Fountain? Some of my fair subjects, no doubt, using their knives and cutting each other's throats from jealousy. Faugh! the wretches!'

'No, your Majesty, they were all in good humour-all was peace.

They were talking a little scandal—that was all.'

'Ha! scandal, let's hear it.' 'But it was of a reverend prelate.'

'Capital!' said the king, rubbing his hands.

'A prince of the church.' 'Better and better.'

' A friend of your Majesty's.'

'Ho! ho! ho! best of all—so open your budget, man, and out with it. Who was it?' 'Alberoni.'

The king's countenance fell.

'Ha!' said he in a tone of anger, 'did the unwashed canaille dare to murmur against him? Did they forget that he was my prime minister? This is too insolent, I must correct them, I must rouse myself—and—' and the poor king, as if to suit the action to the word, half raised himself in his chair, but the effort was too great for his indolence, and he once more sank back into his seat, giving evidence of the immensity of the exertion by a prolonged yawn.

La Roche's shrewd black eye marked every movement, but he said

nothing-he knew his man well.

'Well, La Roche?' said the king, after a pause, and in a tone of interrogation.

'I wait your Majesty's orders,' said the attendant, as he bowed profoundly.

'You said something about the Manolas.' 'I did, Sire.'

'They were abusing Alberoni?' 'They were, your Majesty.'

The king coloured, hesitated an instant, and then, as if his curiosity were stronger than the dignity about which he affected to be so anxious, he said in an irritated tone,—

'Well, you fool, why do not you tell me what they said?"

'After your Majesty's remark, I thought it might displease you.'

'It does displease me. It was too bold—too insolent; but as my just indignation cannot make the words unsaid, I may as well hear what they were.'

'They were singing ballads,' said the tantalising valet.

'I can understand that.'

'Pasquinades-' 'Of course.'

'Broad jokes—' 'La Roche, you scoundrel,' shouted the king, losing his temper, 'hand me my cane that I may hit you over the head.'

'And in what,' said the premier valet, with a face of well-acted

astonishment, 'have I had the misfortune to offend you?'

'You rogue, you rascal, you know well enough. These ballads—these pasquinades—these broad jokes—must have had words and ideas to represent them.' 'Of course.'

'Then tell me them immediately, or I will discharge you on the

spot.' La Roche gave a grin.

'Since your Majesty insists on it I will obey. They were giving an account of the thrashing that the Cardinal got the other day from the Duke of Escalona. And they said such absurd things, your Majesty, that I could not help laughing. "A gardener's boy," said the one—"The cook of Vendome," said another—"The ugly dog," said a third.'

'Nay,' said the king, turning half round in his chair, and regarding himself with undisguised satisfaction in the mirror, 'there is

no denying it. The fellow is prodigiously ugly.'

'He has got no neck,' said La Roche.

'Well, his neck certainly is short.'
'And a head like a large Dutch cheese.'

'Nay, I must confess that it is too round and too big.'

'And then his swarthy sun-burnt hide.'

'Why there is no disputing it,' said Philip, once more turning to survey himself in the mirror, and coaxingly passing his fingers over his face. 'A fine skin is necessary to beauty.'

'And without beauty there can be no real dignity.'

'True, true, La Roche.'

'And without dignity no man can be an efficient ruler over others.' 'You are a just observer, La Roche.'

'Or can discharge with effect the duties of a prime minister.'

'I suspect you are not far wrong, La Roche.'

'A fellow so ugly, so squat, so swarthy, is only fit for a gardener's boy, and if he did venture into a king's presence, he deserved being well thrashed for his impudence.'

'Well, after all, perhaps, you are right.'

'It must have been a funny scene that the other day between the duke and the Parmesan.'

'It was, it was, La Roche,' said the king, eagerly.

'Did the old man hit hard?' 'Had he been the Cid himself smiting the Moors he could not have struck harder.'

'One thump on the shoulder,' said the valet. 'Another on the

head,' chuckled Philip.

'This on the arm.' 'That on the nose.'

And the king and his attendant burst into a loud fit of laughter.

'A fine old noble, said the valet-de-chambre, when the mirth abated, 'your Majesty is fortunate in such a subject.' 'Yes, I think I am.'

'A man I respect and love.' 'So do I.'

'Then your Majesty will order his immediate release from the castle of Segovia.'

'The what?' said the king, in unutterable astonishment. 'The

castle of Segovia,' repeated the valet.

- 'What has that,' said Philip, 'to do with'the Grand Chamberlain?'
- 'Was not your Majesty aware that he had been sent there by Alberoni?' 'Never heard a word of it till this moment.'

'But you will order his immediate release.'

The king fidgeted uneasily in his chair

'Alberoni,' continued the eager valet. 'You should say "the Cardinal," La Roche,' said the king coldly.

'But your Majesty will order the release of the duke?'

- 'You know I never interfere with the affairs of state. There must have been reasons for his arrest.'
- 'I am told—none; but there is one who is better able to inform you on the subject, and who seeks an audience of your Majesty.'

'I detest audiences.'

'It is Donna Teresa Pacheco, the old man's granddaughter.'

'It is impossible, La Roche. She will be weeping and shrieking. There will be a scene, and I cannot bear scenes. They ruin my nerves.' 'Yet she is the only child of an aged and faithful servant.'

'What has that to do with the matter, La Roche? What is the use of old and faithful servants but to give prosperity, and happiness, and comfort to their masters? And where would be my comfort or my happiness, I ask, if I admitted this girl with her entreaties, and tears, and lamentations? It would destroy my night's sleep, I tell you. I doubt if I should recover it in four-and-twenty hours.'

The attendant surveyed his master with something like contempt, and then again for a minute his features were an expression

of deep sorrow.

'I will not give it up yet,' said he to himself; 'the girl must see this heartless brute.' With the words his face resumed its smiles, and he once more approached the king.

'Your Majesty,' said he, in a gay tone, 'I recollect now something in my morning's ramble that will, I am confident, give you pleasure. I met some friends who had just returned from Paris.'

'Ha!' said Philip, raising himself with eager interest. 'What happiness, La Roche. Well, what did they say? What did you hear?' 'They knew everything; they had seen everything.'

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Ah! dear, dear France! how I envy them. Well, speak. What told they you of Versailles?"

'The palace on the outside is the same as ever; but the inside,

how changed! The Oeil de Bœuf has no occupants.'

'And Marly?' 'They say the regent has advertised it for sale.

He would pull it down for the sake of the materials.'

'Pull down Marly!' shouted Philip, in sudden anger. 'Oh the wretch, the beast, the scoundrel! If I had him here I could strangle him. Beautiful Marly!' continued he, as he once more resumed his usual listless attitude of repose, 'how I loved it! Do you remember, La Roche, our fishing parties at the pond in the park, and our picnics in the gardens, and our promenades on the long terrace with Olympia de Beauvilliers? Ah! these were happy times. I was not a king then.'

'No, Sire—you had nothing to do but to enjoy yourself.'

'Do I do so now, La Roche?' said the monarch, with a face as rueful as the knight of La Mancha. 'Quite the contrary.'

'Do you ever see me happy?'

'Never,' said the sympathising attendant. 'I am ready to make

oath that there is not a more wretched king in Christendom.'

'I knew you would say so,' said Philip, seemingly comforted by the remark. 'Yet how different it was formerly! Then we were happy; and Olympia! how happy she was, and how beautiful! Ah! La Roche, did your friends see Olympia?' 'They did.'

'And what said they of her?'

'The error was inexcusable on my part, but, to confess the truth,

I forgot to ask.'

'What a selfish being you are, La Roche,' said the king, in accents of strong disgust. 'How I detest a man without a heart! And what else heard you?' 'My friends saw your nephew, the king of France, his Majesty Louis XV.'

'Ha! the boy must be well-grown now. What say they of him?'

'They saw him dance at a state ball at the Tuileries, and they speak of him in raptures—a vrai cupidon they describe him—the most perfectly graceful and beautiful young man ever seen on earth.'

The king's cheek flushed crimson with sudden jealousy.

'Nonsense, La Roche,' said he, in an angry tone. 'If you hear people utter such follies you should not repeat them. Did your friends ever see me?'

'I believe,' said La Roche, howing profoundly, 'they never enjoyed

that good fortune.'

'Then they shall enjoy it now. I will not permit the world to be gulled into the monstrous error that my nephew is the handsomest man in Europe. No, no. It concerns truth, that such false reports should be crushed at once. You may introduce your too credulous acquaintances when you please.'

'The queen sups at six, would it then be convenient to your

Majesty to receive?' 'Perfectly.'

'And your Majesty may wish to ask some questions about Marly?'

'To be sure I shall.'

'And you could hear if Madame de Beauvilliers has still, like your

Majesty, all the charms of youth.'

'Of course I can. So at six, La Roche, at six, do you hear, precisely.' And the king, in his eagerness, accompanied his attendant to the door.

The premier valet-de-chambre bowed low and retired.

'Dear, dear, France!' said Philip to himself, 'I shall then hear of you again. I shall once more have the happiness to converse with one who has of late breathed your air and seen your sky. And you too, beloved Marly! What delightful recollections are associated with your name! It was on your terrace that I first saw the beautiful Olympia. It was beneath your chestnut-trees that I first whispered to her my love, and pressed my lips to her yielding fingers. What a splendid creature she was! What eyes! What a mouth! What a neck!'

All at once the king's face changed, and his features became con-

vulsed as if by a sudden spasm.

'Miserable man that I am!' cried he in a half shriek, as he struck his breast with his clenched fists. 'What thoughts are these!' and he hurried to the altar at the corner of the room, and flinging himself on his knees before it, bent to the earth, exclaiming, in accents of the most poignant remorse, 'Peccavi Domine—miserere mei.'

# CHAPTER XXX.

#### A YOUNG LADY AT COURT.

It was six o'clock in the evening—the king had once more resumed his favourite lounging attitude, in his great chair. His face, too, wore its usual irritable expression; that of a man who does nothing, and yet frets perpetually, in consequence of the very indolence which he himself cherishes.

In the chamber itself there was little alteration, save that the early evening of a November day had already set in, and brought with it its usual accompaniments. The shutters of the windows were closed, and the room lighted by a chandelier suspended from

the centre of the ceiling.

As six chimed from a time-piece which was fastened against the wall, and whose fantastically carved and gilt frame formed one of the ornaments of the apartment, Philip's restlessness re-doubled. Like all men who are ever behind time, he was a very martinet in exacting in others punctuality, and as soon as the moment had passed which had been appointed for the reception of his visitors, he could not help expressing aloud his annoyance at their non-appearance.

Six o'clock past, and La Roche not come yet. If those French friends of his should have disappointed him. The very thought of it is sufficient to drive one mad. My nerves will never stand this

constant worrying—and such a chance too for a good gossip—for the queen said she was hungry to-night, and I know what that means,'—and Philip sighed. But the sentimentalism was not long lived—curiosity returned, and with it irritation; for the king fidgeted restlessly in his chair, casting his eye on the clock, and exclaiming at intervals—'It is too bad of La Roche. I will never forgive him.'

His Majesty's soliloquy was interrupted by the door being gently opened, and La Roche entered, followed by a figure in a long dark mantle, the hood of which was thrown over the head. But it was dropped as soon as the door had been re-closed, and there appeared beneath it the features of the fair heiress of the Duke of Escalona.

Therese had never looked more beautiful. She was attired, according to La Roche's recommendation, in the costume of the court of Louis XIV.; and what is so well calculated to show off to advantage female beauty? The rich silk dress, with its voluminous folds; the diamond-edged stomacher; the short sleeves, with the lace manchettes descending to the elbow; the necklace; the bracelets; and last and most beautiful of all, the hair, showing the full height of the forehead, clustered on the temples in rich thick curls, and descending to the bosom upon either side, in one long graceful ringlet.

The young lady, as her disguise fell back, curtseyed to the ground,

and La Roche catching up the mantle disappeared.

It is difficult to express the astonishment of the king. He at once saw the trick that had been played him, and that he had been entrapped into granting the very interview which he had been so anxious to avoid. His first feeling was that of anger, but who could be angry with a being so beautiful? more especially when her look, dress, air, brought back a thousand cherished recollections of his boyhood—the beauty of the capricious Montespan—the grace of Madame de Sevigné. The king bowed low, and like a king, for Philip could on occasions assume the courtly manners of his grandsire, and then, with a flushed cheek, and a voice that was slightly tremulous, he said—

"To whom have I the honour of addressing myself?"
"Sire—I am Donna Teresa Pacheco." The king bowed.

'The grand-daughter of the Duke of Escalona.'

The king bowed again.

'The Grand Chamberlain, your Majesty, has been wrongfully arrested, and sent to the castle of Segovia. He is confident that the violence is without the knowledge of your Majesty, and he begs permission to throw himself at your Majesty's feet, and ask justice for himself and on his enemies.'

Philip coloured crimson, hesitated for an instant, stammered forth

some inarticulate words, and then was suddenly silent.

'I had not the good fortune,' said Therese, 'to hear what your Majesty did me the honour to address to me.'

Once more the poor king screwed up his courage to the speaking point.

'There must be some reason, Madam,' said he, in a faint voice,

'for the arrest of the Grand Chamberlain.' 'There is a reason, Sire, but not a sufficient one to warrant the outrage. My grandfather, like all good subjects of your Majesty, expressed himself in strong terms as the enemy of the Cardinal.'

'In that,' said Philip, in the tone of offended dignity, 'the duke forgot his usual discretion, for he should have recollected that the

Cardinal is the minister of his master.'

'Yet, Sire, forgive me for saying, that the kings, your predecessors, have occasionally had bad ministers, and—' and the girl stopped suddenly, and coloured.

'And you would insinuate,' said Philip, in sudden anger, 'that I,

like they, had blundered in my selection?

'Far be it from me,' said Therese, modestly, 'to have such presumption. I do not doubt the wisdom of your Majesty, but—'

'But what?' 'The best wisdom can only exercise its judgment when it has fully before it the matters with which it has to deal, and these, forgive me for adding, have in the present case been studiously

concealed from you.'

- 'No, madam,' said Philip, as his natural obstinacy began to display itself, and gave increased firmness to his voice, 'I will permit you to say nothing of the sort. I am too clear-sighted not to be acquainted with the most minute details of the affairs of this kingdom.'
- 'And do you approve, Sire, of the acts of Alberoni?' 'Madam,' said Philip, with a strong emphasis on his words, 'the Cardinal is my minister, and that is a sufficient answer to the question.'

'And you sanction his arrest of my grandfather?' The king hesitated for a moment. 'The Cardinal, I repeat, madam, is a great

statesman, and I approve his acts.'

'He may be all that you believe him, for I do not dispute your Majesty's better judgment. And yet, Sire, the best of statesmen have occasionally erred. Your Majesty has heard but one side of the question; will you not permit my grandfather to state to you the other?' Philip was silent.

'No, no,' continued Therese, falling on her knees at the king's feet, 'you will not condemn unheard an old and faithful servant?'

And the tears streamed down the young girl's cheeks.

The king appeared to hesitate, but his manner exhibited not agi-

tation, but annoyance.

'Rise, Donna Teresa Pacheco,' said he, at length, 'I command you to rise.' 'No,' said Therese, 'not till I have obtained a favourable answer from your Majesty. You know well,' continued she, speaking hurriedly, 'how long, and how faithfully, my grandfather has served you. When the Austrian was in Madrid, he left his palace to be plundered by the invader to follow your fortunes. When your treasury was impoverished, he melted down his service of silver plate, the cherished heirlooms of centuries, to equip your troops. His only sons, my father and my uncle, died on the field of battle in your cause; and of all his race there remains but myself—a poor

weak girl. Would you break my heart by doing him an injury? Or would you bring down to the grave with sorrow the gray hairs of an old man, who never lays his head on his pillow without praying that yourself, and your son, and your son's son may reign long in the land?'

Philip's features, while the girl was speaking, exhibited no softening. On the contrary, the mouth assumed a harsher outline, and the whole face wore the expression of sullen obstinacy.

'I am sorry, madam,' said he, in a freezing tone, 'that I cannot

grant your request.'

'Then,' said the young girl, as she sprang to her feet, while her cheek crimsoned and her eye flashed fire, 'I will no longer degrade myself by making it. But I might have expected the result of my errand, for I sought justice at the hands of the house of Bourbon.'

'Madam,' said the king, haughtily, 'none is more ready to grant it when it is deserved. Mine is a family that has ever been distinguished for the rigorous discharge of its duties, and therefore heaven

has blessed it.'

'Has heaven blessed it?' said Therese. 'I deny it. It may have given to it, for a time, prosperity; but what has been the end?'

'A great, a noble one. Is there any more deserving of envy?"

'Is there any less so? Your race has had rank and power. God gave them fleets, and armies, and a throne. But he found them selfish and hard-hearted; they forgot the benefits he had bestowed, for they did not do what they ought to have done-disseminate them amongst others, or protect those of whom he intended them to be the protectors. Therefore has his hand been heavy upon them and upon you. Your father, your mother, your brother, nearly every member of your family, were struck down by an inscrutable disease; and the very king who was the greatest of your ancestry, and whose glories are your boast, died a beggar; with neither the gentle offices of love nor the words of religion to cheer his latter hours. The woman he had raised to a throne, from being the wife of a deformed buffoon, deserted him. The priest to gratify whom he had sacrificed a million of his subjects, alike fled from his death-bed: and the corpse of him whom you call the Grand Monarque was carried to its last resting-place, not with the pomp of court ceremonial, or amid the tears of sorrowing subjects, but unseen, unknown-in the dead of night, lest the coffin might be violated by an infuriated people, whom he had permitted evil ministers to plunder and tyrannize over with impunity. Such too, Sire, have been your acts, and such also will be your punishment. I will leave to God to grant the justice that I am denied by man.'

It is difficult to express the effect upon Philip of Therese's words. The sudden and ill-explained death of almost every member of his family; the misfortunes that had clouded the last years of Louis XIV's life; the ingratitude which marked his death-bed; and the indecent, the almost monstrous, neglect of his obsequies, had often formed the subject of the solitary young king's musings: and his

superstitious temperament had ever been disposed to look at them as direct visitations from the hand of the Almighty. But most of all, however, was he alarmed by the allusion to the desertion of Le Tellier. It was generally understood that the confessor of Louis XIV had left his penitent in the extreme agony; and to the bigotted mind of Philip, to pass from this world without the presence of the church, was equivalent to perdition in the next. When, therefore, Therese began to draw a parallel between him and his predecessors, and to predict for him a similar fate, his cheek paled, his limbs trembled, and mind and body became the subject of the most extravagant terror. The new feeling paralyzed him at first, but as he recovered himself, the king moved towards the young girl as rapidly as his feeble, uncertain steps would permit, and exclaimed in a voice almost inarticulate from agitation—

'Recall those dreadful words, Donna Theresa; I pray, I beseech you to recall them!' 'On the contrary,' said his companion, haughtily, 'I repeat them: I leave my cause with God. He will give me that justice which is denied by man.' And she moved towards the door.

The king hurried after her. He seized hold of her hand, and dropping on his knees at her feet, said, in agonized accents, 'No—no, Donna Teresa, you go not; you shall not leave this room till you have recalled those dreadful words. Indeed—indeed they are not deserved. I am not unjust; I am not ungrateful. And I would prove it. I will yield to all your wishes. I will admit your grandfather to an interview; I will set him free; I will not permit a minister to trample on my people; I will dismiss—' but his Majesty's sentence was not destined to be concluded, for angry voices were heard without, and, 'ere the king could change his position, the door opened with violence, and a man entered.

The unwelcome intruder was Alberoni.

The Cardinal, as our readers by this time know, was indebted for his power solely to his influence over the king; and, with a mind so unstable as Philip's, that influence could only be preserved by the rigorous exclusion of any one who might be able or willing to sway him to other counsels. To secure an isolation so necessary to his safety, Alberoni had gained the officers of the palace in immediate attendance on the sovereign, and had instructed them to admit none to an audience of royalty unless they bore the countersign of the minister; while, to guard against unexpected dangers, the door of 'the Cabinet' was rigorously watched by numerous and well-paid agents. Some of these had witnessed the introduction of the mantle-shrouded figure, and they had hastened to convey the intelligence to their employer. The news embarrassed him.

Who the visitor might be the (ardinal did not know; but the mystery proved an enemy, and the only object of an enemy could be to plot against his absolute authority. There was danger, then; yet what could be done to avert it? To leave the party to continue their machinations uninterrupted was to increase the peril; and yet

it was not safe, unwished and unsent for, to break in upon the royal privacy. Philip cared little about parting with the reality of power; but he enforced with nervous jealousy the etiquette which gave him the appearance of it. In what light might he view the intrusion of the Cardinal? There was danger on either side; but that of incurring Philip's anger appeared the lesser of the two.

'I will risk it,' said he to himself. 'If there be a storm, it will soon pass away. So I will e'en risk it, the more especially as I suspect that this cloaked visitor has something to do with the

meeting of the grandees and the arrest of Escalona.'

He had accordingly proceeded round the gallery that encircled the court-yard, and connected his own apartments with those of the sovereign. At the door of the royal closet he found La Roche in attendance. The sturdy valet de chambre refused either to admit or to announce him; but he had to deal with a spirit even more decided than his own. The quick-eared prelate had heard the voice of the king speaking in the accents of entreaty; and unable any longer to control either his fears or his curiosity, he had himself

opened the door, and burst into the chamber.

It would be difficult to paint his surprise when, instead of the veteran statesman, whom he expected to have found within, he discovered the companion of the king to be a young girl. With any other sovereign, the attitude of the monarch and the singular loveliness of his companion would have suggested the idea that the present tête-à-tête had more to do with love than diplomacy. But Alberoni knew his master too well to doubt for a moment his rigorous propriety; and even had such doubts existed, the first glance at the lady's face would have served to remove them. Prior to her visit to France, the Cardinal had often seen Donna Teresa Pacheco. He recognised her in an instant; and his quick-witted intellect at once led him to guess at the real cause of her presence in the king's closet, and the object of the interview. He was not long left in doubt with regard to either.

Scarcely had the prelate entered when Philip rose from his knees; but it was not with the timid mien with which he generally met his prime minister. Superstition had roused his feelings, and the new breach of etiquette but added to their power; and it was with the tone and dignity of Louis XIV in his haughtiest days, that he

demanded the reason of the intrusion.

The Cardinal coloured. The proud priest had been spoiled by prosperity. He was not accustomed to be spoken to in the tone of a master; and his self-love felt the mortification doubly, because it was destined to be listened to by other ears, and witnessed by other eyes, than his own. His presence of mind, however, did not desert him. Sinking upon one knee for an instant, as etiquette required in the audiences of churchmen, he resumed his usual upright attitude, and in a tone at once firm and insinuating, he said,—

'I have to offer a thousand apologies to your Majesty; but most important despatches have this instant arrived, and I was anxious

not to lose a moment in receiving your Majesty's instructions with

regard to them.'

'Whatever might have been their consequence,' said Philip, haughtily, 'Cardinal Alberoni should have recollected that the king was the person most interested in their contents, and that he should have been consulted as to the time when he was disposed to listen to them. But it is best as it is,' added he, with a malicious smile, 'for we were about to command the presence of your Eminence. We have just been informed that the Grand Chamberlain has been sent to Segovia. The report is almost too extravagant to be credited; but your Eminence can inform us. Is it true?' Alberoni bowed.

'And upon what grounds,' said the king, in an angry tone, 'has one of my oldest and most faithful subjects been sent to a dungeon?' 'It pains me to say it to your Majesty,' said the minister, in an

apologetic tone, 'it was for plotting treason against your royal person.'
'I do not, and I will not, believe it,' said Philip; 'and my orders

are that he be instantly set free.'

'Your Majesty—' began Alberoni, in a voice which bespoke opposition to the royal mandate; but he was instantly interrupted.

'I will not listen to a word, Sir; I will be obeyed.' 'No one

disputes your Majesty's orders,' said the Cardinal: 'but—'

'Not a word,' almost screamed the king, crimsoning with passion. 'I will be obeyed.'

The minister saw that it was necessary to bend for the moment to the storm.

'Your Majesty's wishes are law,' said he. 'Will you condescend to express them?' 'The instant freedom of the Duke of Escalona. You can write now and sign the order.'

'My signature of itself would avail nothing, your Majesty. It must be countersigned by the secretary of state, Don Michael Fernandez Duran, Marquis of Tolosa.'

'And when will the proper document be ready?'

'To-night,' said the minister; 'the whole of the formalities can

be gone through to-night.'

'Be it so; and see it despatched before you sleep. And now, Donna Teresa,' said the king, addressing his fair companion, who had been an agitated spectatress of the conference, 'I will not detain you longer. By midnight the Duke of Escalona shall be free.'

'Ah! Sire,' replied the young girl, as she stooped low and kissed the king's hand, 'how can I express my gratitude to your Majesty? But is it certain? Am I assured of it? Will there be no delay?' And her eye glanced uneasily at Alberoni. 'None, Madam; I pledge you my royal word for his liberty. And now I will bid you good night.' With these words he rang the bell.

La Roche, said he to his attendant as he entered, 'where waits the sedan-chair of Donna Teresa Pacheco?' 'Below, your Majesty.'

"Order it to the Gallery of Pictures at once."

The premier valet retired, and instantly returned to announce that his Majesty's instructions were obeyed.

'Now, Donna Teresa,' said the king, 'allow me to conduct you.'

As he spoke he took hold of the points of the fingers of the young lady's left-hand and, with a grace worthy of the Duke of Richelieu, led her to her chair. Its four porters stood bare-headed. On either side, on their knees, were as many pages, each bearing a wax taper, while a dozen lacqueys, carrying torches, and armed with long rapiers, waited behind.

'You will remember your promise, Sire?' said the girl, timidly.

'I will remember, and perform it,' was the answer; and the heiress of the house of l'acheco entered her velvet-covered vehicle, and departed to her home. Joy sparkled in the young girl's eyes, and she looked confident of the future. Alas! that she should have forgotten the words of Holy Writ, 'Put not your trust in princes.'

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### A KING AND HIS MINISTER.

It can easily be understood with what feelings of deep pain Alberoni had witnessed the result of the conference narrated in the preceding chapter. The stake for which he played was immense. Wealth—power—perhaps life, was on the cards; for the offence of the Grand Chamberlain was, in fact, a conspiracy against the supremacy of the minister, and if that offence were pardoned, the supremacy was gone.

He was not a man, however, to resign easily the game, and he had employed the brief interval which had elapsed during the king's absence in meditating on his reception, and its probable consequences.

'I never saw Philip so decided,' said he to himself; 'he assumed the tone of a master; were he to continue to act the part of one, I am a lost man. And this girl has witnessed all—has been the cause of all. It is the second time that I am indebted for evil to her accursed race. But I will pay them back,' said he, as he clenched his fist, 'I will pay them back, and when I have made the old villain shorter by a head, I shall have taught the grandees of Spain a lesson which may, possibly, make them hesitate in future ere they attack my supremacy. And the king, too, with his customary and perpetual "I will be obeyed." Pshaw!—I have heard the words too often to fear them. But I must rekindle his hatred of the Duke of Orleans. I must rouse his ambition. They are cards that have never failed me yet, and are the only ones left me. But here he comes.'

As he spoke, Philip re-entered the closet, and, closing the door,

took his seat with an air of great dignity.

There was silence for a minute.

'Well, your Eminence,' said the king, in an irritated tone, 'considering your anxiety to see me, methinks you lose valuable time. What are the news you spoke of?' 'Most important, your Majesty. Your untiring enemy the Duke of Orleans has once more been at his dirty work.'

'Impossible!' said Philip; 'with a truce scarce three months old, he would not already renew the war?" 'He would do worse, Sire. Open violence can always be successfully met. It is more difficult to battle secret treachery.'

'Ha! he is plotting, you say? But how-when-why?' 'He has

despatched a secret envoy to your court.'

'His object?' 'To corrupt your servants, and thereby impede

the action of your Majesty's government.'

- 'And this envoy—have you heard of his arrival in Spain? Can you tell of his whereabouts?' 'His present residence,' said Alberoni, with a malicious smile, 'is pretty well known; it is the tower of Segovia.'
  - 'You have arrested him, then?' Alberoni bowed. 'Where?'

'At the house of the Duke of Escalona.'

There was a pause, as if Philip had felt annoyed by the answer. After a while, the king continued:—'When?' 'The day before vesterday.'

'What did he at the Grand Chamberlain's?' 'He was present at the conspiracy—I ought to say at the meeting of the grandees,

presided over by the head of the house of Pacheco.'

Philip fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

'The Duke of Orleans,' continued the Cardinal, 'is your Majesty's cousin; but, though a kinsman, he is less than kind. He it is who is the cause of these perpetual attempts against your Majesty's 'Yes,' said Philip, in a low tone, and as if addressing government.'

himself, 'he has ever been my most bitter enemy.'

- 'I speak not of his attempt to persuade your grandfather to place himself on the Spanish throne, or of his unjustifiable seizure of the regency—I speak only of his audacity in violating the sanctity of private life! Did he not call one of your august sisters, the Duchess of Bourbon (I blush as I repeat the insolence), a wine cask? And has he not spoken of the other, the Princess of Conti, in terms with which I will not offend your Majesty's ear?'
  - 'Did he—did the scoundrel say all this? How I hate him!'

'So do I,' said the Cardinal, in a voice which left no doubt of the sincerity of the assertion. 'And yet, but for your Majesty's too Christian forgiveness of injuries, how easily might these slanders be avenged!

'You think so?' 'I do. Heaven has given you all the qualities necessary to greatness. You are brave-does not the world speak of

your actions at the battle of Luzzara?"

'Ah, what a day! I was fifteen hours in the saddle. How tired I was!' And the king stretched his limbs and yawned, as if once

more exhausted by the very recollection.

'Then, your Majesty is the mightiest monarch upon earth. What sovereign has so many kingdoms? Are you not the king of Navarre and of Arragon, of Valencia and of Toledo, of Murcia, of Granada and of Jaen, of Cordova and of Seville, of Galicia and Leon, and Majorca and Minorca, and Castile and Jerusalem. Are not Naples, and Sardinia, and Sicily, all rightly subject to your sway? Are you not, too, Duke of Milan, and Count of Barcelona, and Lord of Biscay? and have you not in Mexico, and Peru, and the New World, a larger territory than all Europe, with mines of gold and silver, that make you richer than its greatest potentates?

'Yes, yes,' said Philip, 'I am a great king,' and his eye sparkled for an instant with pleasure at the enumeration of his honours, but the excitement was but momentary, and, as if fatigued by listening to the catalogue, he once more sank back among the cushions.

'Yes,' said the Cardinal, as he marked the king's cheeks flush, 'you are a great monarch; but the territories your Majesty possesses are but the means of procuring for you still more extensive dominions. Your Majesty is descended from a race that sits upon the throne of Charlemagne. You have the beauty, the talents, the ambition of the great conqueror—why should you not possess his empire?' 'Why not?' said the young king, as his cheek once more coloured with pleasure, and he half raised himself from his lounging attitude, and rubbed his hands.

'You would be the redoubted master of the world.'

'I should like that. It would be worth being a king if everybody

trembled when they spoke to me.'

'And the attainment of your Majesty's wishes is not difficult. You have already one half of Italy—you will conquer the remainder. You are justly the Regent of France—you will displace your unprincipled cousin, and be its master:—its real master,' continued the wily priest, in a lower tone, 'for I am told that your nephew will not live. It is not a month since he had fits, and was so ill that they had actually prepared the viaticum. You will impose your rule on Holland; it will be an easy task; and by putting the Stuarts again on the English throne, you will, in fact, have in that country a vicercy, who must obey your orders, for he cannot exist without your aid. Then, Sire, you will be a king, indeed—no, not a king, but an emperor—mightier even than your mighty predecessor. And the historians of future centuries will forget the glories of the great Charles in commemorating the glories of the still greater Philip.'

Alberoni had at length succeeded in arousing the attention of his master. In the first instance, the king's eye had been languid, and his cheek pale; but as the enumeration of his future dignities proceeded, he at length caught the enthusiasm of the speaker, and flushed and almost breathless with excitement, he listened with undisguised pleasure to the gorgeous descriptions of his companion.

'And why,' said he, as soon as the Cardinal had concluded, 'if I can be all this, why am I not all this? And for what purpose, and to what end, have I a minister who can plan and cannot execute?' 'Alas; your Majesty ties my hands!'

'I!' said the king, in astonishment. 'Yes, Sire. Even you.'

'I cannot comprehend it.'

'Then may I be permitted to explain?' Philip gave a sign of assent.

When your royal ancestors to the north and south of the Pyrenees, Louis XIII. and the Emperor came to their thrones, they had extensive kingdoms and but little power. Why? 'I confess, Alberoni, I have never considered the subject, so you may tell me.'

'Sire, France and Spain were alike divided into numerous minute principalities, whose sovereigns, the great nobles, instead of supporting their royal masters, were invariably occupied in plots, conspiracies, and rebellions, for the purpose of thwarting them; and the monarchs of two extensive kingdoms were powerless abroad, from being perpetually engaged in combating disaffection at home.'

'Well?' 'The evil, as your Majesty sees, was a radical one, but your ancestors each possessed a minister who had a powerful

will, and a knowledge of ancient history.'

'What had that to do with the matter?' said Philip. 'I can understand the benefits arising from their strong will, but what ancient history had in common with Richelieu and Ximenes, is, I confess, beyond me.'

'Sire, it suggested to them a principle. The strong will but gave them the means of carrying it into effect.'

Philip shook his head, as if still puzzled.

'Nay, I have but to allude to the passage, and your Majesty's happy memory will at once recall it and see its application. Tarquinius Superbus had in his neighbourhood a town, which (like your Majesty's city of Barcelona) was a constant subject of annoyance to the royal authorities. His son, Sextus, could not rule it. He asked for advice. The old king took the messenger into the garden, and with his cane—'

'I remember, now, said Philip, eagerly; 'he knocked off the

heads of all the poppies.'

'No, Sire; not of all-only of the tallest ones; -only of those

that approached to himself in height—that aped the king."

'And what, in the name of heaven, had this to do with Richelieu or Ximenes?' 'They took the hint, Sire, and adopted the principle. They, too, were conscious that the weakness of the sovereign arose from the power of the great nobles; and, like the Roman, they crushed the evil by removing the cause of it.'

The king said nothing.

'And what,' continued the Cardinal, 'was the auspicious result? Your two ancestors, who had commenced life as petty princes, saw themselves, at its close, the mightiest potentates of Europe, and the arbiters of its destinies; and such would I have your Majesty.'

'And such would I be. But where is the obstacle to my greatness?' 'Need I speak it? From the laxity of the last three reigns, Spain has once more become what it was in the early days of the emperor. It is tyrannised over by a hundred petty despots, who call themselves your subjects, but are, in fact, your masters.'

'Stop, Alberoni,' said Philip, hurriedly, and with a flushed cheek; 'this is too insolent.'

'If your Majesty take amiss the zeal of your servant, he will be silent. He has but for his consolation the knowledge that he has

spoken the truth.

'And where is the proof of such intention to resist my authority?' 'Does it not more or less exhibit itself daily? Why, it is scarce twelve months since the Dukes of Veraguas and Las Torres entered into a plot to seize your Majesty's person and place the Prince of Asturias on the throne. Out of your too great magnanimity, you pardoned them, and what has been the result of your elemency? Why, here we have a fresh plot at the palace of Escalona, at which he and some other grandees meet together for equally treasonable purposes.'

'No, no, Alberoni. They did not threaten me! Your Eminence

was the mark they aimed at.'

The Cardinal started with surprise, but he instantly recovered himself.

'On the contrary,' said he; 'I have to assure your Majesty that a direct proposal was made for the seizure, not of so insignificant a being as myself, but of your sacred person.'

'Are you well advised of that?' 'I will prove it.'

'You will prove it you say, but when?' 'When the Duke of

Escalona is brought to trial.

Philip seemed violently agitated. He rose from his seat, and paced the room with hurried steps. Suddenly he stopped, and once more threw himself into the fauteuil, changing his place repeatedly, and fingering, nervously, at intervals, its cushions.

'Alberoni,' said he, at length, 'the Grand Chamberlain is my old

and faithful subject.'

'He was, Sire. He is so no longer.'

'He has done me in his day good service.'

'Therein he did but his duty, and a mere discharge of duty de-

mands no gratitude.

'And would you,' said the king, in a low, agitated tone, 'would you condemn him on mere report?' 'I am his accuser, Sire, not his judge. It is only the Council of Castile which can decide on his guilt or its punishment.'

'But you seem to have a personal enmity to the man?' 'Pardon me, Sire; you forget that I am a churchman, and that my holy calling permits not my mind to be affected by the feelings com-

mon to frail humanity.

'But he is my friend.' 'Kings can have no friendship with

traitors. They have only duties.'

'And what do you say are mine?' 'Heaven has made you the sovereign of this country, the embodiment of the idea of its government, and government is to a nation not a blessing, but a curse, unless it can make its authority respected; and it ceases to be respected if evil men are permitted to plot against it with impunity.'

Philip once more fidgeted, and grasped convulsively the arms of

his seat.

'Sire,' said Alberoni, 'to a heart so affectionate as yours all acts of justice must be painful, for to one party, at least, justice ever implies punishment; but you will not hesitate, for you have before you the brilliant example of your predecessor?'

'Of whom speak you?' 'Of Louis XIII. The Marquis of Cinq Mars was his most intimate friend, but the King of France did not hesitate to sign his death-warrant when he plotted treason

against the state.'

'This necessity for punishing is a cruel one.'

'It is not the less a necessity.'

Philip said nothing.

'In this,' continued the Cardinal, 'your royal ancestor exhibited a signal example of self-sacrifice, for he forgot his own private

affections in his zeal for the discharge of his duty.'

There was a silence for some minutes. The king evidently became more and more agitated. He spoke at length, but in a low faint tone. 'And you would put the old man to death?' 'Heaven forbid!' said the Cardinal, with well-acted horror. 'I would but bring him to trial before the Council of Castile.'

'And in the mean time you will do him no injury?' 'None.

I swear to your Majesty, by the Holy Virgin of Atocha-none.'

'But I had resolved on giving him his freedom.'

'Your Majesty decided under a misconception. You had had the facts carefully concealed from you. You did not then know that the duke was a traitor.'

'But I have promised, on my kingly word, his liberty to his

daughter.'

'Ecclesia absolvet. Holy Church has the power to bind and to loose. I release you from the pledge.'

Philip groaned aloud, and bending forward, buried his face in his

hands.

The Cardinal affected not to see the embarrassment of his com-

panion.

'Then I have,' continued he, after a pause, 'your Majesty's permission to impeach the duke for high treason before the Council of Castile?' 'If it must be so, it must, Alberoni,' said Philip. 'I consent; but I need not say with what pain.'

'Nevertheless, Sire, it is a duty, and you will not hesitate to discharge it. Your conscience will repay you for the sacrifice, and to one so justly celebrated for his devotion as your Majesty, what hap-

piness is so great as that conferred by conscience!

The Cardinal retired as he spoke, and the king once more hurried to the altar in the corner of the room, and flinging himself on his knees before it, wept.

#### CHAPTER XXXL

#### EXPLANATIONS.

On the following morning Therese was informed by the faithful La Roche of the sad change which had taken place in the sentiments of the king. She had received, too, from the same source, the more startling intelligence of the intention of the Cardinal to bring the duke to trial before the Council of Castile, for the quick-witted valet had contrived to extract from his master all the concessions made to the minister, and he had hastened to report them to the young heiress of the Grand Chamberlain.

The news filled her with dismay. She had lived too long in Spain not to be aware of the venality of justice in a country where, to be charged with an offence by a powerful opponent, was considered sufficient evidence of guilt. It was true the members of the Council were men of high rank, but the Spaniards of all classes have inherited from the Arab their greed for gold as well as their indisposition to labour. All, with scarce an exception, were willing to be bribed, and the only difference in the would-be recipients of the bounty was the amount of the money to be offered for their purchase. It was the power of gratifying this avarice that made Alberoni dangerous. Had he been merely unscrupulous, he might have been defied; but he had at his command the wealth of the monarchy, and was ready to lavish it on judge or official if obedient to his wishes. All this the young girl knew, and the knowledge made her tremble, for she felt that for her grandfather to be brought to trial by such a man, and before such a tribunal, was equivalent to his condemnation.

There were other causes of disquietude. Donna Teresa was aware that the present calamities of her house had originated in the hostility of the duke to the Cardinal, and she could not help feeling conscious that for this violent enmity, she was herself in some degree to blame. If she had not originated the prejudices of the old noble, she had, at least, given them additional force by her counsels and her sympathy. But it may not be amiss to pause for a moment for the purpose of detailing her history, and showing how it was that so young a creature had been mixed up with intrigues at once so important and so little in common with the tastes or habits of her age

and sex.

Her father was the Count of Gormas, the eldest son of the Duke of Escalona. Her mother, a sister of the Prince of Chalais, was the niece of the Princess of Ursins, and had followed her to Madrid. The Camerera Mayor, for many years, was, in fact, the mistress of the kingdom of Philip V., and she had naturally done her best to exhibit the attractions of her relative to advantage, and surround her with the young men who were reputed to be the best matches in Spain. Amongst these was the Count of Gormas. He became fascinated by the attractions of the fair stranger, and wooed and won her.

Donna Teresa was the only produce of the marriage, and had re-

ceived an education such as at that time few of her countrywomen enjoyed. In the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV., the Court of France was the most accomplished in Europe, and was even less distinguished by the genius of its men than the brilliancy of its women. The rule of Madame de Maintenon, who had passed middle life when she attracted the attentions of the Grand Monarque, and who, even in youth, had never been handsome, was, in fact, the rule of a powerful and educated mind. It was her intelligence and the charms of her conversation that made her rival successfully the beauty of La Vallière, the dignity of Madame Soubize, the tender prudery of the Duchess of Roquelaure, and the wit of all the Mortemars. The unacknowledged Queen of France was conscious of her power and proud of it, and she endeavoured to perpetuate its influence and memory by giving to the younger of her own sex accomplishments similar to those which had made herself a sovereign. She established the school of St. Cyr.

Amongst the juvenile ladies of noble family who were fortunate enough to be admitted to it was Adéle de Chalais. She was clever and ambitious, and availed herself eagerly of its advantages. A few years saw her one of the most distinguished of its members, and with a mind well stored with everything that study could confer.

But though a school can give book-learning, it can give nothing more. To make man or woman powerful in society, a knowledge of society is requisite, and this her great relative the Princess of Ursins supplied. The Camerera Mayor was what the French call a mattresse femme, and under her auspices the young lady received all that practical information which was wanting to make perfect the more vague studies of her childhood.

The Countess of Gormas did not discard her accomplishments with her marriage; she devoted them to the instruction of her daughter, and Therese, under her mother's auspices, became that rara avis in Spain—a well-informed woman. With her mother's talents she had inherited something of the high spirit and unbending character of her father's family, and when, upon the death of both her parents, she became her grandfather's solitary descendant, she gradually, partly by her amiable character, and partly by the charms of her mind, became, not only his idol, but his companion. By degrees, the mutual affection of age and youth ripened into confidence. By degrees the girl became the depository of the old man's hopes—his wishes—his fears—his prejudices and his discontent—his loyalty to the king—his hatred of Alberoni.

The consequence of all this was, that his juvenile counsellor had suggested to the Grand Chamberlain employing the influence of Anne de la Tremouille with Philip, for the purpose of effecting the dismissal of the Cardinal. The advice was adopted; but as in the complicated arrangements consequent on a matter so delicate, and with an enemy so unscrupulous, it was dangerous to trust even to private letters or special couriers, it was decided that the young lady herself should go to Paris and see her relative in person. The

plan was carried into effect. Therese joined Madame des Ursins in the French capital, but alone, for she had left her attendants at Bayonne; and thither, immediately after their arrival, had been sent back the duenna by an order to that effect from the Duke of Escalona. Anne de la Tremouille lived under a feigned name, and her grand-niece, for the purpose of better aiding her concealment and baffling the spies of the Cardinal, assumed her mother's designation of Mademoiselle de Chalais. In such companionship it may easily be understood that the young lady entered more eagerly than ever into the schemes for the overthrow of the Spanish prime minister; and on Madame des Ursins refusing positively to return to Madrid, had undertaken, herself, to conduct the details of the plot, provided she were furnished with a political subordinate of the other sex. Several names had been recommended to her as of men qualified for the office, but, in concert with her aged kinswoman, she had rejected all, and had chosen Colonel Clifford for her coadjutor.

There were reasons with both ladies for this. We have already mentioned that Lord Clifford, before he succeeded to the title, had married, at Madrid, a Spanish woman of rank, who had enjoyed the intimacy of the Camerera Mayor, and that of this union Charles Clifford was the second son. By the elder of the petticoated Machiavels (for both Lord Stanhope and Dubois gave implicit obedience to her wishes), the young soldier had been selected for the diplomatic appointment, from her own memory of the boy's high spirit, his intimate acquaintance with the Spanish language, and more especially that passion for frolic which had been the subject of many complaints in the confidential letters of his mother to Madame des Ursins. But the pranks that terrified the parent, formed a subject of unqualified pleasure to her correspondent. The passion of the lad for mixing in every class of society in Madrid—to-day as an hidalgo, to-morrow as a water-carrier, now as a gipsy, and now as a contrabandista—served to prove alike the adventurous spirit of the young Englishman, and his power of supporting with success every variety of character. And it was for these reasons that the aged friend of Mrs. Clifford recommended her son to Lord Stanhope for a mission, the success of which so much depended on the envoy being able to assume the manners, and be mistaken for one of the people among whom he was to mix.

Her companion's reasons for concurring in the selection were different. Clifford's mother had been a Zuniga. So also was the mother of the Duke of Escalona, and of course the great-grandmamma of the young lady who had now undertaken to overturn a ministry; and as in the plot in which she was about to be engaged, Therese felt she must necessarily be thrown much into the society of her fellow-actor, her natural delicacy revolted against forming a sudden intimacy with a stranger. The same objection did not apply to Clifford. She had never seen him, it was true, but he was her

relative, a cousin—no doubt a distant one—but still a cousin. The word is one dear to female lips. It has a thousand meanings. To the secret thought it may represent a friend, a confidant, a lover; but the idea clothes itself in the most legitimate guise of conventional phraseology. Whatever be the quantum of affection secretly lavished on the favoured mortal, its outward symbol at least gives no sign of it. From the lips of frozen age, as from those of impassioned womanhood, comes alike the phrase at once so eloquent

and so undemonstrative, 'It is only a cousin.'

There were, perchance, other causes for the preference. During the year which Therese had passed in Paris, she had lived with the Princess of Ursins, and with the exception of some few brilliant court ceremonials, that lady had been her sole companion; for the success of their joint plot depended upon secresy, and secresy in its turn required seclusion. They were thus thrown much upon one another's society, and passed the long days and evenings in gossip. In this, Madame des Ursins played the principal part. Her agitated life as Madame de Talleyrand, her gorgeous existence as the Duchess of Bracciano, and most of all her brilliant career in Spain, during twelve long years, supplied her with a thousand delightful recol-But most of all and naturally did her reminiscences cling to Madrid, with its motley population, and the romance and perpetual masquerade of its society. And often would she tell with a laughing eye of the maternal disquietudes of Mrs. Clifford, and read passages from the carefully-preserved letters, of the perpetual scrapes and frolics of her harum-scarum son.

Therese was fascinated. Girls detest well-behaved boys. The young gentlemen who never tear their clothes, or wet their stockings, or break windows, or are too late for meals, may be the delight of their adoring mammas, but they are held in unspeakable contempt by the little damsels of their own age, who lavish their affections upon ragged urchins who are ever risking their necks after birds' nests, or breaking into orchards, or getting what belongs to them of the human face divine made into a sort of mosaic through the medium of the agency of the fists of their fellows. The passion of girls for pickledom, in their male associates, does not end with their childhood. Mrs. Clifford, when she wrote of the peccadillos of her youngest boy, groaned in spirit. The dark-eyed heiress, as she listened to the narrative from the lips of Madame des Ursins, decided that the hero of the anathematised exploits

must be a charming fellow.

The favourable feeling became strengthened by indulgence, and at length bore its fruit. We are little acquainted with female hearts, but we suspect that if some who knew them better had probed that of the fair Spaniard, they would have discovered that the young colonel's masquerading exploits at Madrid formed no contemptible portion of the reasons for her giving her zealous sanction to the suggestion of Madane des Ursins, that he should be selected as her coadjutor in the plot, which was hatching for the

destruction of the Cardinal. It may appear but small ground for the choice of a diplomatic agent; but if the early history of one of those great statesmen, who, within the last thirty years, has passed from the stage, were laid open, it would be found that he was indebted for his first step in political life to predilections resting on causes still more extraordinary.

In the mean time the Princess of Ursins had woven the different threads of her plot into a continuous web. She was, in fact, the master-workman that gave to it strength and consistency. hatred of Alberoni had naturally suggested the idea of his downfall. and her eminent talents, her intimate acquaintance with Spain, and more especially her interest with many of its leading nobles, had, of all others, fitted her for effecting it. Of this fact Stanhope and Dubois, the British and French ministers, were well aware, and instead of devising anything themselves, they had been contented to adopt the plans and obey the wishes of the female Machiavel. These were now ready, and the princess gave instructions to her young relative to prepare to return to Spain. But as it was important alike that she should be able to assist the envoy selected by Stanhope for the private mission, and be acquainted with his appearance, Madame des Ursins instructed Dubois to bring the young soldier to her lodgings in the Marais; and there behind a screen he was paraded before herself and the youthful heiress. The next matter was to secure his safe arrival at Madrid. The disguise of the contrabandista might do something, but that was not considered sufficient, and to aid his progress Perez was ordered to Irun.

The history of the Gitano is already known. The brother of Don Ambrosio, a dissolute noble of Andalusia, had done violence to a gipsy girl, and l'erez, her brother, slew him. The family of the dead had the Gitano seized and brought before a court of justice. As justice is, and was, administered in Spain, the fate of the prisoner seemed inevitable, when Donna Teresa took up his cause. She had seen the girl, had purchased from her articles of female adornment, and upon learning her sad story, induced her grandfather to interest himself in Perez's behalf. The face of affairs changed at once. The house of Pacheco was more powerful than that of Pimental, and, as a matter of course, its protegé was pronounced to have acted on sufficient provocation; and was set free.

From that day the gipsy tribe became the slaves of Donna Teresa. Most of all, Perez devoted himself to her service; and when it was decided that Clifford should go to Madrid, a sum of money had been sent him, with instructions to assume the dress of an arriero, to purchase three of the finest mules which could be got, and to wait at Irun with the animals as if on the look out for a job.

To prevent his being hired by any chance traveller, he had orders to ask a price so extravagant for the use of his beasts as to prevent all risk of their being employed. He was furthermore instructed, that when the party for whose service he was really intended had arrived, he should be informed of the fact by Donna Teresa's holding up her forefinger, and drawing it across her mouth. As to the young lady herself, he received the most positive injunctions to affect an utter ignorance of her person, name, family, and connections. The story will now explain itself; and the reader will comprehend Perez's indifference to Clifford's offers in the first instance, and his after eager acceptance of them. He will understand, too, the intense interest that the Gitano took in the motions of Don Ambrosio, and his anxiety to save his benefactress at the Somo Sierra. He it was who had uttered the cry of the owl under the young lady's windows at Buitrago, and had ordered his tribe to seize Clifford in the neighbourhood of the Moorish tower.

The object of the friendly violence was simple enough. An under official of the government at Madrid had been gained by the Princess of Ursins. He was well paid, and despatched from time to time any intelligence which he thought might be interesting to his patroness. The couriers employed were gipsies of Perez's tribe, and they had instructions to meet the young heiress on fixed days, and at certain points of the road. Buitrago was one of the rendezvous. Therese had heard something of her grandfather's increasing discontent. She dreaded an explosion. She was anxiously expecting her messenger when Clifford surprised her on the balcony; and she had asked him to her room as much for the purpose of removing him cut of Perez's

way as for any other.

The expected courier came, and brought important despatches the announcement of Alberoni's suspicions of the real character of the contrabandista, and the instructions to seize him at the city gate, and deprive him of the documents which were necessary to the success of his diplomacy. At first Therese had intended disclosing to him his danger, but the idea was discarded almost at once. felt that to win belief from the young soldier, she must give him full explanations, not only of the object of his mission, but of the part which she herself had acted in getting him appointed to it. But this delicacy forbade. Had the crisis occurred in the early part of the journey, she might have mustered up courage for the effort; but of late, and more especially since the adventure of the Somo Sierra, new feelings had sprung up, scarce intelligible perhaps to herself, but which made her crimson with confusion at the thought of confessing to her young companion that for weeks, nay, months, he had been the object of her thoughts and her plans. So long, in short, as she was perfectly indifferent to him, she cared nothing about his suspecting her of affection; but the idea of such a suspicion became intolerable the moment the affection existed in reality. Such are the mental vagaries of the daughters of Eve.

What followed may easily be guessed at. Perez, in obedience to her instructions, had called in the aid of his tribe, and Clifford was seized in the manner which we have already related, and carried to an old castle, a favourite haunt of the gipsy marauders. Before leaving Paris, Therese had been made acquainted by Dubois with

the documents entrusted to the young Englishman, and more especially with the mode in which he was instructed to conceal them. She was thus able to give to the Gitano the information which at once led to their discovery. But she feared entrusting them to strange hands. The documents were of importance, nay, were absolutely necessary to the success of the plot, for they contained the bills of exchange, and the letters of credence to Scotti, to the confessor, and to the queen. The gipsies might lose them; might be tempted by their evident value to offer them for sale to an employé of the government; or, supposing their fidelity was proof against temptation, might be deprived of them by any officer of police who might choose to immortalize himself by the extraordinary freak of enforcing for once the laws of the country; and these, of late, had been made of extreme severity against the swarthy-faced vagabonds.

She determined, therefore, to take charge of them herself. With her they would be safe, for, at the gates of Madrid, a lady could not be an object of suspicion, and her luggage would be unsearched. Upon this decision she had acted, and had awaited in the neighbourhood of the ruin itself the success of her plans. There, accordingly, she received from Perez the valuable documents, as chanced to be witnessed from the top of the tower by her unfortunate captive, and had then made her way to the inn, about a league distant,

which was to be her quarters for the night.

On the following morning she had continued her journey to Madrid, and before Clifford arrived had transmitted the abstracted papers to his apartment in the Calle de la Cabeza, with whose existence also, and the name of whose landlord, she had been entrusted

by Dubois.

So far all had gone well. She herself, and her coadjutor in the plot, were both safe in the capital. But now began difficulties which she had not anticipated. The Duke of Escalona had eagerly awaited the presence of the Princess of Ursins in Madrid, as his assistant in the conspiracy against the Cardinal. It may be easily imagined how bitter was his disappointment when he learned from his granddaughter on her arrival, the refusal of Anne de la Tremouille to leave France.

It was in vain that the fair diplomatist had attempted to diminish his regrets, by informing him of the selection of an English envoy to replace Madame des Ursins, and his being accredited by the prime minister of France and the ambassador of England. The bigoted old noble loved neither country. He detested the English, for they had been the main support of the Austrian competitor for the throne; while he himself had been one of the earliest and most zealous adherents of the Bourbon dynasty. His hatred of France was not less strong. Dubois was prime minister of the Duke of Orleans, and the Duke of Orleans had made himself regent in spite of the better claims of the Spanish king. Besides, as he justly remarked, the exertions of the grandees might be considered as patriotic and national so long as they were unaided, or aided only

by the Princess of Ursins, who from her having for twelve years exercised supreme power in the Peninsula, was considered a country-woman; but that the admission of a stranger to a share in their councils, or their acts, might give them a different character. He declined, therefore, all assistance at the hands of the new-comer, and spoke with so much violence, that the young girl did not dare again to introduce the subject, and still less to tell of the adventure of the Somo Sierra, or of the feelings of gratitude which had sprung up in consequence of it.

Her vexations did not end here. The fierce old man had for twelve long months with ill-enduring patience brooded over his wrongs, in the hope that the arrival of the Princess of Ursins would enable him to overthrow the minister, and obtain their redress. With that hope vanished his forbearance. He lost all self-control, attacked Alberoni with his stick in the king's presence, and two days after summoned to his palace those of the grandees whom he knew to be as determined in their dislike to the favourite as himself.

With the unhappy issue of the meeting our readers are already acquainted. The day was one of evil fortune to all parties, for Clifford too was its victim, by following Therese from the street to her father's house. The young lady's reasons for avoiding him were simple. She knew not how to treat him. He had saved her life. and more than her life, and he had therefore a claim upon her gratitude. If he had been old, or ugly, or disagreeable, she would have had no difficulty in acknowledging it. But it was dangerous to confess the obligation, to one who had already taken firm hold of her imagination, and whose power over her she felt would be increased by every succeeding interview. To think of loving him was madness; for her grandfather's prejudices had become from age and disappointment more violent than ever. To see him, without loving him, was impossible. She decided, therefore, upon carefully concealing herself till he had left Madrid, or if she did venture forth, to do so only at the time of the siesta, when the streets were deserted, and she believed her motions likely to be unobserved.

The plan was well arranged, but she forgot that the same necessity for caution would naturally suggest to the young envoy the same hour for his wanderings. It had been so, and in spite of herself they had met. The reader has learned the unhappy results of the tête-à-tête—the discovery of the would-be contrabandista—his seizure—his escape from the grand chamberlain, only to be sent into captivity by the prime minister.

In all this there was much reason for wretchedness; for however involuntarily on her own part, she could not help looking upon herself, in some degree, as the cause of the double calamity. In one matter only was there consolation. The catastrophe had, at least, broken the web of mystery which had wound itself round her, and which had been of late so hateful. There was no longer need for concealment between herself and her cousin. That was one thing to be thankful for. There was another result of the misfortune for

which she was still more grateful; it had made her grandfather acquainted with the person of his new relative. Nay, more, it might be from the gallant conduct of her lover in the moment of trial—it might be from other reasons—but whatever were the cause, the young girl could not help feeling that the duke had lost much of his prejudice with regard to the companion of her journey; nay, she sometimes fancied looked upon him with the eye of favour. Thus, though there was much misery, still, even in the sorrow there were gleams of sunshine; and notwithstanding the general gloom of the horizon, it was with feelings hopeful of a brighter future, that Therese once more took the road to the ancient fortress, which was now the dungeon of her grandfather, and of one, whom she could not help confessing to herself, was scarcely less dear to her.

### CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE CASTLE OF SEGOVIA.

'THERE are no beautiful prisons,' is a favourite proverb in Spain; but if we take it in its literal sense, few countries present better evidence of its falsity. About thirty miles north of Madrid, on the extreme verge of the broken ranges of the Guadarama, is a steep and narrow ridge, running from east to west, and bounded on its northern side by the Eresma, and on the south by a brook called El Clamores, or the 'Noisy Water.' From the banks of the two rivers, rocks rise precipitously, forming a natural wall, and, from the facilities they offer for defence, probably, in the first instance, suggesting the idea of the future fortress. On the summit, and at the extreme west end of the ridge, may still be seen in strong relief against the sky, a venerable pile, gray with age. To the eastward rises its lofty donjon, the work of the Goths; while the western portion of the building, in its pointed towers and numerous minarets, still exhibits traces of its Moorish origin. The natural charms of the surrounding scenery — the sparkling streams, with their banks clothed with timber—the lofty and frowning rock—the gay spires and massy keep—together with a thousand inequalities of outline, supplied by outer walls and the buildings of numerous court-yards, present, in their combination, a romantic beauty never surpassed, and rarely equalled. Yet such was, and is, the Castle of Segovia, the state prison of Spain, erected as if to give the lie to the proverb of the country, which denies that prisons can be beautiful.

The apartments of the Duke of Escalona were in one of the inner courtyards. They were on the ground-floor, and entered from the courtyard itself; but their windows looked northward beyond the boundary of the fortress, and down the narrow valley

through which the Eresma pours its waters to the Douro.

The wing of the château in which the duke was lodged stood about twenty feet from the edge of the precipice, and that in its turn was bounded by a low wall, which followed the irregular outline of the crag, and was ornamented here and there by vases coarsely carved out of the stone of which the wall was formed, and probably introduced for the purpose of breaking the formality of its outline. The narrow space which lay between the parapet and the castle itself, had been laid out in a terrace-walk, bordered, on the side next the rock, by turf and flower-beds. Beyond, the cliff sunk

perpendicularly to the waters of the Eresma.

The quarters of the duke were handsome. The fortress had originally, under Alonzo VI., King of Castile, been the residence of royalty, and some of the best of its apartments had been placed at the disposal of the Grand Chamberlain. The suite consisted of seven or eight rooms running along the terrace, and communicating with it by a doorway, so as to give to the noble prisoner the power of taking air and exercise at pleasure. The interior, if not comfortably furnished, retained at least its ancient decorations, and the rooms possessed that rare luxury in the Peninsula, chimneys; for the conquering descendants of Pelayo had come from a cold region, and they brought with them the accessories its inhospitable temperature had rendered necessary. The general use of the brazier, so universal in Central and Southern Spain, ever bespeaks the lengthened presence of the sun, and is intended only as a makeshift, during the short period of his absence.

Therese, for the second time, entered the walls of her grandfather's prison. She was the messenger of sorrow, and yet she found enough on the spot to give her ground for anxiety. Pride was the besetting sin of the house of Pacheco; and the Grand Chamberlain had in no degree derogated from his race. To one so haughty and high-spirited, it can be easily understood how overwhelming a calamity was his imprisonment. The mere confinement was nothing. The weight of the blow was in the disgrace. To think that he, Don John Pacheco, the first officer of the court, the man who had been viceroy of many provinces, the representative of a line distinguished for centuries, should be consigned to what he called and considered a dungeon, was bitter enough; but the draught had been made infinitely more nauseous by the recollection that he was indebted for his degradation to a paltry foreign priest. the son of a gardener at Parma, the pander to the vices of the Duke of Vendôme, the sycophant of the Princess of Ursins, the favourite of the queen and her master. This irritation of feeling, strengthened as it was not only by his natural temperament, but by his great age, had become every hour more violent. It had at length produced its natural results. The duke became ill. It was in vain that his medical attendant, who had been permitted to follow him, exhausted the resources of his art; the old man grew gradually worse and worse, and at length took to his bed.

It was there Therese found him on her return from Madrid; but she brought no consolation to the invalid. On her entering the room the duke had looked eagerly in her face, but without speaking. It was unnecessary. His grandchild's expressive features sufficiently told the tale of her failure. As for herself, she said nothing of her visit or its results. As yet her aged relative only suspected that the king had refused to see him; but he dreamed nothing of the approaching trial, and his granddaughter felt thankful that he had asked no questions. Had he done so she would have felt it unworthy to deceive him; and yet to inform him of the future

disgrace would be to kill him.

Still, though she brought no agreeable intelligence, the presence of the girl by his bedside did the old man service. It is in the hour of sorrow that women appear to the most advantage. Few can bear prosperity. If we examine the annals of history, or listen to the gossip of present life, it is a strange fact, but not the less a true one, that those of the softer sex who have most distinguished themselves by their folly or their vices are precisely those to whom Heaven has been most kind; on whom it has lavished health and wealth and beauty, and adoring relatives and distinguished or trusting husbands. It is not so with those of their sisters whose lot has been more clouded. To woman more especially the uses of adversity are sweet. As fire proves gold, it developes her energies and her virtues; and when misfortunes do come, and the mind and body of her stronger helpmate sink beneath them, then it is that she rises superior to their influence; then, what hand but hers can smooth so gently the pillow of sickness? what lips but hers can whisper so comfortably the hope of a brighter future to despair?

It was by such offices of affection that Therese gradually brought

a calm to the bosom of her aged relative.

Her grandfather in some degree recovered his spirits. Sorrow, too, seemed to have softened his heart; for though he still carefully avoided speaking of the causes of his imprisonment, or its probable duration, he entered more largely than formerly into the interests of his grandchild. It might possibly be to produce forgetfulness of his own calamities that he now, for the first time, questioned her largely upon the manner in which she had spent the year of her absence in France; of the names and number of her acquaintances. and the appearance of the distinguished persons with whom she had been brought in contact. Then, too, followed the details of her journey. Therese concealed nothing. She told of Clifford's first appearance at Irun; of the attack of Don Ambrosio, and the rescue; of Clifford's capture, and visit to the Moorish tower, and the abstraction of his papers; of their accidental meeting in the Calle de los Cuchilleros; her flight through the garden; her enforced interview, her hiding him behind the tapestry, and his discovery

The duke listened to everything, and with undisguised interest. His grandchild would have given worlds to know if he suspected her new-born liking towards her soldier relative; but if such suspicion existed, the old man said nothing from which she could form an opinion. One thing, however, was certain—the narrative had awakened no displeasure. It was possible that he had penetrated his grandchild's feelings, and was anxious to avoid any expression which might pain them. It was possible that regret for his own

violence in the banqueting-room had disposed him, like all violent men, to go to the other extreme, and show to the young envoy an equally extravagant kindness. Both causes might have had their influence; but it is probable that nothing contributed so much to his new feelings of charity as the discovery of the relationship of his

fellow-captive.

The Duke of Escalona was a true Spaniard. He considered a grandee the most important person upon earth, and next to him a grandee's relatives. Besides, he had strong affections, and more especially was passionately attached to his mother's family. Thus the young soldier had a double claim upon his likings. By the mother's side at least he was a Spaniard. He was more—he was a Zuniga, descended, like the duke himself, from a house which had always been celebrated as one of the most distinguished of Castile, and which had been ennobled in half-a-dozen different branches.

Whatever was the cause of the softening of the old man's heart, it produced results which Donna Teresa could not have anticipated. 'My child,' said he to her, as she sat by the bedside on the

second day after her return, 'we have an act of justice to perform, and the sooner we discharge it the better. Our unfortunate relative—how did you call him?' 'Colonel Clifford, grandpapa,' said the

young lady, blushing deeply.

'Yes; Colonel Clifford, my love, is a prisoner like ourselves, and I cannot help thinking that to us he, in some degree, owes his captivity; for if I understand you aright, it was to aid me that the Princess of Ursins had him despatched from Paris. It is true that I have not felt, and do not feel, disposed to accept of his services. Still that is no fault of the lad's, and it is hard that he should suffer for what some would call my perverseness. Perhaps, too,' continued the old man, with a quiet smile, 'a young lady of my acquaintance has been to blame; for I cannot help thinking that the cavalier would not have so madly thrust his head into the lions' den, unless the eyes of the damsel whom he followed, had some time or other looked on him with more kindness than they should have done. But you need not colour so violently, my love; and I will save you the trouble of making so many protestations. It would be folly in a portionless cadet looking with affection upon the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain; but still, in one who has the blood of Zuniga in his veins, the admiration has not that extravagant insolence in it which I once So, as he is a relative, we must treat him with the believed. civility to which he is entitled. I cannot, to be sure, in my dungeon receive him with the prince-like hospitalities which I could have offered him at Madrid. But even here I doubt not he will be glad to exchange the solitude of his own apartment for our society; and my old friend Juan Sanchez will, at my request, grant him the privilege.'

With the words the duke touched a hand-bell which stood on the table near him, and, through the medium of an attendant, requested the presence of the alcayde. Don Juan soon appeared, and at once

gave his consent to the wishes of his distinguished guest.

'My chief,' said he, 'the Conde de Chincon, the hereditary governor of the castle, is now absent; but I am satisfied that I only follow his wishes, in gratifying the desire of the Grand Chamberlain. I shall be happy to conduct Colonel Clifford hither.'

'You will do more, Sanchez, said the old man. 'The young fellow chances to be a relative of mine; so you will even give to him as to me, the privilege of walking on the terrace. The poor boy, I dare say, would be glad enough to breathe the air of heaven.'

Nothing can be more easy, your excellency. The staircase which leads to the chamber of the English prisoner communicates with the hall from which enter your apartments. I will leave the caballero's room open, though, for my own sake,' continued he, with a smile, 'I must turn key upon the great door which leads from the hall to the court-yard. Colonel Clifford can thus make his way to the terrace at pleasure. At ten o'clock, however, your excellency, we lock up, and the young caballero must once more return to his quarters; but till that hour, and during the day, he will be to all intents and purposes free, as far, at least, as the terrace is concerned, and the apartments in this wing of the château.'

'You are kind, Don Juan,' said the old noble, 'most kind; and now, when the siesta is over, do me the favour to conduct hither

your other prisoner.'

The alcayde retired. At two hours after mid-day he again reentered the chamber, bringing Clifford along with him; and the young soldier was thus once more introduced to the lady of his love, and by a train of circumstances which neither he nor she had ever contemplated, by the permission—nay, more, at the special request—of her redoubtable grandsire.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### THE STORY OF A CAMERERA MAYOR.

The old noble, as his visitor entered, half raised himself from the

pillow, and courteously extended his hand.

'Good morning, Colonel Clifford,' said he, 'or rather good morning, Don Carlos Zuniga. With the envoy of England I as liege subject of Don Philip, can hold no conference; the more especially,' continued he, laughing, 'as it could only refer to unpleasant reminiscences. With my trusty and well-beloved cousin it is different. Here you shall be known only as Don Carlos Zuniga, and you have a legal right to the title. For in Spain, honours, estates, grandeeships are all, as the French say, en quenouille: or, in other words, a mother transmits to her offspring, rank, wealth, name, as readily as we, the lords of the creation. So, again, I bid my relative welcome to the residence of the Grand Chamberlain.' And the invalid once more took the hand of Clifford and shook it kindly.

The duke rather prided himself on his eloquence, and he doubted not, that upon the present occasion he had delivered an address loyal to the king, honourable to himself, courteous to his guest, and gratifying to the feelings of his granddaughter. It might have possessed all these qualities, but to say the truth, it was scarcely listened to. Had Demosthenes himself delivered it, it would have met with no better fate. The eyes of Clifford, in spite of his efforts to command his attention, were fixed on Therese, and the young lady, though she affected to gaze steadily on the floor, with that mystic knowledge which belongs so invariably to women, when the object of admiration, was evidently conscious of his gaze and coloured beneath it.

It was possible that the duke saw the embarrassment of his relatives, or it might be that he was under the influence of his new-

born feeling of courtesy, for he once more broke silence.

'Let me make you,' said he, 'acquainted with my granddaughter, Donna Teresa Pacheco. But I had forgotten,' added he, with a meaning smile, 'you have met before, and she has informed me that she has received an important service at your hand.'

Clifford hastened to say that the aid he had rendered he had

performed with pleasure.

'It may be so,' said the duke, 'but we are not the less your debtors. It is the only happy result that has flowed from the di-

plomacy of our old friend the Princess of Ursins.'

'Ah!' said Therese, with a sigh, 'what would my poor grandaunt say if she could contemplate us now, and know the utter failure of her plans?' 'Say, love? what she has said a thousand times before, "Patience, and shuffle the cards." One who has spent life as she has done, amid the changing fortunes of court favour, is too well acquainted with the game to expect to trump every trick. It is the Cardinal's luck to-day; it may be hers to-morrow. You come into Spain, lad,' continued he, turning to Clifford, 'as the apparent representative of the wishes of two kingdoms. You little know you were but the agent of a woman's vengeance!'

'Her injury was a mortal one, and it is natural that it should make itself recollected even after so long an interval.' 'It was. It destroyed at a blow the hopes, the fortunes, the ambition of a

life. But I see that you have heard the story.'

'I am but slightly acquainted with it, and, indeed, merely with its outlines.' 'Then listen to its details; and with the greater attention, as the events I am about to relate affect us. But for them you, and I, and my grandchild, would not to-day have been at Segovia.'

And the old noble, by the assistance of his fair descendant, sat up in bed, and after having his back carefully supported by additional

pillows, spoke as follows:-

'You know my sovereign, Philip V., married when but seventeen, on his succession to the crown of Spain, Maria Louisa Gabriela, a daughter of the Duke of Savoy, some three years his junior. Our relative, the Princess of Ursins, then a woman of thirty, was appointed by Louis XIV.—the grandfather of the king—to the post

of Camerera Mayor, or, in fact, of nurse to the royal children. The selection was an admirable one. The noble lady discharged well her duty, and amid the changeful fortunes of the War of the Succession, supported the weaker courage of the young sovereigns. Both were well aware of the benefits they owed her, and both repaid her with the most ample confidence and gratitude. During the whole of the life of the Savoyarde, as our first queen was termed, the princess ruled the kingdom; and we—for my eldest son married her niece, the mother of Therese—shared her honours and rejoiced in her prosperity.

'But darker times came. The Savoyarde died, and Louis XIV commanded that his grandson should marry again. The princess herself might have shared his throne; for time, and habit, and gratitude, and the companiouship of many years had produced strong affection; but she nobly refused a prize which was within her grasp, and which, to a woman of her great ambition, must have been so fascinating. She refused the king's vows. Philip, by her counsel, decided on marrying the daughter of some sovereign house, and the Princess of Ursins herself was asked to make the selection.

'At that time there was at the court of Spain, a priest—an abbé of the name of Alberoni. He was poor, friendless, unknown. He had originally been a gardener's boy at Parma, and had afterwards become, successively, cook, buffoon, and companion to the Duke of Vendôme, and followed his patron into Spain. There the duke died suddenly, and his parasite had once more to commence the ladder of life. He had no means of returning to his own country, and no hopes of preferment there. He found his way to Madrid, studied carefully the court, and determined to make it his Eldorado.

'It was at this time, that the report was spread abroad of the intention of Don Philip to re-marry himself, and of the power given to the Princess of Ursins to choose the future queen. Alberoni found means of access to the Camerera Mayor. He was bold, insinuating, and ready-witted, and in a short time obtained the mastery of her ear. He suggested to her a wife for the king. She was Elizabeth Farnese, our present sovereign, the niece of the Duke She was represented by the wily priest as meek, amiable, unaspiring, without self-will, without ambition. The portrait owed its features entirely to the imagination; but it pleased. The toocredulous Camerera Mayor fell into the snare, and the Abbé Alberoni was despatched to Parma, with power to conclude the marriage. It took place accordingly by proxy, and the new queen started for her future home. She took her way through France. Her equipages and attendants met her at the frontier, and she continued her route southwards. The marriage was to take place at Guadalaxara, a town of old Castile, half-way between the Pyrenees and Madrid, and thither Philip repaired to await his bride.

'In the mean time, the queen had arrived at Xadraca, a small town seven leagues to the north of it. There too went the Princess of Ursins to meet her new sovereign, and in the full court dress of Camerera Mayor; for the king had reappointed her to the office which she had held under the Savoyarde.'

The duke paused for a moment as if from exhaustion, and then resumed:

'It was the 23rd of December, 1714. I shall never forget the day. The winter had been an early one, and the country was covered with deep snow. At seven o'clock in the evening, the princess arrived at Xadraca, and was at once introduced to the presence of Elizabeth Farnese. What think you, Don Carlos, was her reception?'

'I know what it should have been,' said Clifford. 'The Camerera Mayor had given one of the mightiest thrones upon earth to the pauper relative of a pauper prince! and she was entitled to expect in return, favour, wealth, honours, everlasting gratitude!'

So much for the poetical justice of the drama. Learn the realities of its last act! No sooner had the princess entered, than the queen addressed her in language of anger and abuse, and on Madame des Ursins approaching for the purpose of humbly remonstrating, Elizabeth Farnese affected to fear personal danger and shrieked for aid. The room was filled immediately with her guards and attendants.

"Arrest me that woman," said she to the officers in charge, "and send her off to the French frontier—instantly—instantly, I say,

without a moment's delay."'

'And what,' said Clifford, 'did the officer? To one who had been so long in the habit of viewing Madame des Ursins as the paramount authority, the order must have been embarrassing.'

'It was so, and Amenzaga, who was in command of the detach-

ment of the royal guard, hesitated.'

Naturally enough,' said Clifford laughing; 'but to hesitate was in fact, to refuse; and what did the queen?' 'She drew from the bosom of her dress a slip of paper and presented it to Amenzaga. He read it—grew pale as death—bowed to the ground, and then turning to the Princess of Ursins, in a faltering voice told her she was his prisoner. Anne de la Tremouille forgot, perhaps, her dignity, for she declined to obey, but her refusal was unavailing; some troopers of the quard dragged her to her carriage, and within about half-an-hour after she had first seen the creature of her ill-advised bounty, she was on her way to perpetual exile.'

'What a fate!' said Clifford.

'Ah! you know not,' broke in Therese, passionately, 'you know not half its cruelty. The ground, as my grandfather has informed you, was covered deep with snow. They had provided for her no mantles, no cloaks, no covering of any kind to defend her from its influence. There were no relays of horses—no food prepared—nothing to make the journey less painful. For fourteen long days and nights did she continue her tedious route—with no warmer clothing than her court dress, and scarce any food but some eggs hastily prepared at the miserable hostelries.'

'True, my child,' said the old noble. 'These were privations, and no small ones; but they were merely physical—and what were they

compared with the mental misery which she endured? For twelve years she had been the real sovereign of Spain, her glance obeyed—her words law; and now a captive, a beggar, sent into exile from the country she had ruled, with almost as rude a treatment as would have been exhibited towards its meanest felon!

'And was it ever discovered,' said Clifford, 'what was the cause.

or who the author of a charge so extraordinary?'

'Need you ask, Don Carlos?' said Therese. 'The cause and the author were alike one—Alberoni! He had won the ear of the Camerera Mayor by exaggerating the timidity and the absence of ambition in the princess. He had won the ear of the princess by representing in colours equally extravagant, the overbearing temper and the despotic will of the future mistress of her household. He it was, who had suggested to Elizabeth Farnese the instant dismissal of Anne de la Tremouille, and he, too, had prepared all the accompaniments, even to the most minute, of the tragedy.'

'No Machiavel could have planned it better,' said the young envoy. 'And yet in all great political events success depends as much upon chance as upon forethought. If the officer of the guard had refused to arrest his former mistress, the Camerera Mayor, and not Elizabeth Farnese, might to-day have been ruling in Madrid.'

'The danger,' said the old noble, 'had occurred to Alberoni, and (for I would do no injustice to his talents) been provided against. He had obtained from Philip, at the request of his future bride, an order in the royal handwriting, and with the royal signature, commanding the officer of the guard to obey implicitly in all matters, and upon all points, the commands of his future sovereign.'

'And this was the paper which the queen presented to Amenzaga?'

'It was.'

'And did the king know of the manner in which his order was to be employed?' 'That,' said the old noble, gravely, 'is a matter between Philip and his God; but however innocent might have been his intentions, the result was not the less fatal. The Yoel Rey is a talisman which we all obey in Spain, and in this case, as in others, it performed its mission. Don Philip may have written in ignorance the order to his officer, but it did not the less condemn the friend of his youth to perpetual exile.'

'What a strange fate!' said the young envoy, 'and what a termi-

nation to a career of almost unrivalled brilliancy!'

'Yes,' said the duke. 'There are few records in the annals of human revolutions of a fall more sudden or more terrible. Alberoni was successful, but you can guess well the feelings of his victim. The interests of England and France may and must alter with passing events, and their intrigues may seek to prop a ministry to-day and ruin it to-morrow; but the policy of Anne de la Tremouille changes not. Five years have elapsed since the catastrophe; five long and wretched years. A hundred times have they witnessed her plots for the downfall of her betrayer, and a hundred times they have seen their failure. But still she goes on, hoping against hope, and like

the spider, reconstructing the threads of her web as often as they are broken: and eventually she must and will succeed, for the perseverance of a life is ever successful in the end. Are not we ourselves the best witnesses to her power? I am an old man, one of the greatest and wealthiest of Spain's nobles. You are young—a soldier—the representative of a foreign people; and this girl, by our side, is at the age when girls think of nothing but ornament, and dress and pleasure; and yet all three, diverse as are our objects, our interests, our aspirations, are to-day the inmates of a prison—and why? Because we are nothing but puppets in the hand of this wonderful woman.

There was silence for some time. Clifford and Therese seemed busy with their own thoughts, and each, as they in turn contemplated the strange incidents and unexpected combinations which had congregated them in their present abode, could not help admitting the justice of the conclusions of the Grand Chamberlain; but the old noble was in no mood to permit the continuance of the melan-

choly which was gradually stealing over them.

'Come, Therese,' said he, in a cheerful tone, 'we must not be down-hearted. I have seen enough of the changes of life to know that Fortune's wheel is ever turning. In one short year I was viceroy of Naples, then captive of the Austrians, and then once more free and powerful as ever, and why should it not be so again? Today the luck is Alberoni's—it may be ours to-morrow; so let us have done with politics and despair. You were wont to be skilful with your guitar. It is long since I have heard its notes. Give me, then, one of my favourite romaunts. It will recall associations of happier times.'

Therese obeyed. The instrument so universal in Spain, was introduced, and with exquisite taste, she sang that most beautiful of old Spanish ballads, whose plaintive character so well suited to the circumstances of the moment, and which probably suggested it to

her memory. It was that which begins with the words—

'Fonte frida—Fonte frida—Fonte frida—Y con amor.'

When the melody was ended, Clifford fancied he saw something like exhaustion in the invalid, and rose to retire. Ere he departed,

the old noble once more shook his hand kindly.

'I shall be glad to see you, Don Carlos,' said he, 'when you are disposed to expend your leisure in sitting by a sick man's bed. I shall be glad to see you, I say, for you are of my mother's family, and I love all of her name. But I will not always condemn you to so little cheerful an associate. The alcayde, for the sake of past times, has been kind to us, and has given my granddaughter the adjoining chamber for her own use. There she will be happy to receive you in the forenoon, for I am confident I speak but her thoughts when I say you will be welcome. You will have an opportunity, too, of preparing yourself for fresh diplomacy, by practising your Cas-

tilian; though, to say the truth, it is unnecessary, for there is not a lounger at the Puerto del Sol who better patters our language. So,

once more, good night.'

Clifford bowed to his host. He bent still lower to the beautiful being by his side. The courtesy was replied to by a flushed cheek, and a somewhat agitated inclination of the head, and the young envoy returned to his apartment.

On the following morning he availed himself of the permission given him, and sought Therese in her sitting-room. The meeting of the lovers was one of embarrassment, for the lady was timid and

shy. Clifford remarked the feeling, and guessed its cause.

She is alone,' said he to himself: 'she is unprotected. I must prove to her that I deserve the favour so generously granted to me by the Grand Chamberlain. Amid the misfortunes of her house it would be an insult to intrude my feelings upon her attention. I will not speak to her of love—I will be to her as a brother.'

This resolution was, for the most part, rigorously adhered to. His manner and conversation were those of one who took a deep interest—an affectionate interest—in the fortunes of his companion, and in those of her venerable grandsire, but they were strictly kept within

these limits, and never even hinted at a warmer feeling.

Insensibly Therese remarked the delicacy of his conduct, and caught courage from it. Their conversation, by slow degrees, became more frank and confidential, till at length, the whole of her past life—the hatred of her grandfather to Alberoni—her anxiety to forward his plans, her mission to the Princess of Ursins—her residence in Paris, and the different means proposed for carrying out the plot, down to the selection of himself, were all unreservedly laid open to him. To him, too, were narrated the full details of her interview with Philip—the promise of the king for the liberation of her grandsire—its recall at the suggestion of Alberoni, and the ominous intentions of the Cardinal, communicated to her by La Roche, of bringing the duke to trial, were each enlarged on in their turn.

'And if it were so,' said Clifford to his companion, 'why should you encourage such gloomy anticipations of the result? The duke is innocent of anything but a wish to displace a prime minister.'

'It is true; and no one knows it better than yourself, for you were a witness of the conference from its commencement to its close. Yet it cannot be denied—the duke himself would not deny—that the Count of Lemos proposed treason against the person of the king, and how could a distinction be drawn between the author of such a plot, and the man in whose house that plot first received utterance?"

'You think, then?'—and Clifford hesitated.

Therese observed his embarrassment, and interpreted justly its

'Yes,' continued she, in a faint tone, 'I think my grandfather's life in danger!' 'And is there no way to save it?'

'But one—the fall of Alberoni before the day of trial; and

that, God help me!' continued she, clasping her hands, 'seems impossible!'

There was silence for a minute: it was broken by Clifford.

'I do not,' said he, 'look so despairingly on the future as yourself. You well know that I was sent into this country for the purpose of overthrowing the Cardinal, and was furnished by those who sent me with what were considered sufficient means. Could I but have obtained an interview with the queen, I am confident I should have prevailed on her to dismiss the minister.'

'Yes, I recollect; and the interview would have been no difficult matter to accomplish, for you were furnished with private letters commanding to that effect the good offices of the Marquis Scotti, ambassador of Parma.' 'You allow, then,' said Clifford, joyfully,

'that the fall of the Cardinal is still not impossible?'

'With the powers you possess, it might not have been, were you free; but you are a captive, and they are useless.' 'And why

should I remain a captive?

Therese looked at him with astonishment, and then added, with a faint smile, 'You forget, Don Carlos; you are in a royal prison, and its walls are not like those of houses which children build upon the sand. You cannot sweep them away at will.'

'True: but I may at least escape from their bondage, for in such a cause, I hold nothing impossible. Ah!' continued he, in a confident tone, 'if I had but friends without—if I had but the aid and the counsel of that quick-witted rascal, my Gitano guide, I should soon leave my gaolers to look upon an empty cell!'

The young girl started, and for a moment her features expressed

strong agitation.

'And would you, Charles?' said she—'would you, for my sake—for my grandfather's sake, I mean—undertake such a risk?' 'Do you doubt it?' said her lover; and for a moment his resolutions were forgotten, and his eloquent glance told the tale which his lips refused to utter.

'But the risk!' said his agitated companion. 'Have you calculated the risk? Do you know that if you fail, you will be loaded with chains, and consigned to the walls of a dungeon? Nay, it may be worse—even worse;' and Therese, in horror at the picture which her imagination had called up, sobbed convulsively, and buried her

face in her hands.

Clifford approached her.

'Therese, dear Therese,' said he, taking her hand, but with great respect; 'weep not, and think not of me! When I first heard of this mission, I knew well the perils attendant upon it, and ere I accepted it, left fear behind. Think not, therefore, of me. Think only of him of whom you ought to think—of your aged grandfather. If any evil were to overtake his gray hairs, how bitter would be your remorse when you recollected, that you might possibly have warded it off, but for your too great delicacy to one who was, but a few weeks ago, a stranger.'

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Therese shuddered, but she made no effort to withdraw her hand. 'Come, my dear cousin,' said her companion, in a firm, yet gentle tone, 'nerve yourself, and all may yet be well. You have power over these gipsies—you have probably some means of communicating with them. If so, I pray you, earnestly, to use it. Let me but once have conference with Perez and I am again a free man!'

'And why,' said Therese, 'if freedom be thus easily procured, have you not obtained it already?' 'Why! Can your own feelings not suggest the answer? Or think you that a prison has aught

but charms for me if you are its inmate?

'Yet you would go now, and go willingly;' and the tone of the fair speaker had in it something of complaint. 'And do you reproach me with that? Yes; I would go now, and willingly. My first object in life is your happiness, and I leave you to secure it; for where would that happiness be if the old man's gray hairs were

brought with sorrow to the grave?'

'You are generous, Charles; most generous, and you will excuse the petulance of a wayward girl. I will no longer throw difficulties —God help me! that I should say so—in the way of your enterprise. You will escape, and all may yet be well, for you were right in your surmises. Perez and his tribe are at my service, and a short note, which I received yesterday, communicated to me the residence of one of them in the town. To-morrow I will see the man, and if the aid of the Zincali be sufficient to secure your flight, rest assured that you will have it zealously rendered. And now, for the present, adieu! I am ill, and need repose.'

She bowed timidly as she spoke, yet coldly, for the poor girl began to fear that she had permitted her secret to escape her; and the consciousness of betrayed affection naturally produced reaction, and, the momentary semblance at least of the opposite feeling. Clifford, too, had once more re-entered within the limits of that grave politeness which he had laid down for himself, and which, for the instant, he had momentarily forgotten; and as he retired, he replied to the courtesy of his companion by an obeisance as formal as her own. Strange the approximation of animate and inanimate nature! Many a volcano is covered with snow, and often do the most burning passions of the human heart shroud themselves beneath the veil of chilling indifference.

# CHAPTER XXXIV

### MANUELA.

THERESE kept her word, and the gipsy scout performed his part well. On the second day after his departure, a large tribe of the swarthy wanderers appeared in Segovia or its neighbourhood. Some of them took up their quarters in the ruinous buildings of the town itself, while the larger portion encamped on a gentle slope on the northern side of the Eresma, and directly opposite the terrace which formed the pleasure-ground of the prisoners. These were, for the most part, housed under their low, dingy tents, but the chief of the tribe established himself in a dilapidated farm-house standing on a knoll on the edge of the woodland, somewhat in advance of the habitations of his fellows, and at no great distance from the castle. There he set up his portable forge; for, in Spain, Vulcan may be considered the special god of the gipsy tribes, and to their hands have been in a great measure abandoned farriery and the other subdivisions of the trade connected with tin or iron-work. The rest of the male members of the community were not idle. They had brought with them, for sale, horses and mules, some of excellent quality. These were picketted on the low grounds beneath the tents, and occasionally took their exercise on the plain by the side of the river.

The scene was one of great animation. The numerous canvas-covered edifices scattered here and there as chance dictated, now half hidden in the forest, and now breaking in irregular groups from its shade; the gay-coloured flags which streamed from their summits; the swarthy population, with its dirty but still gaudy Oriental, and picturesque-looking drapery; the busy life; the click of the hammers of the tin-smith; the heavier blow of the blacksmith on the anvil; the horses galloping to and fro, as, with their wild riders on their backs, they were exhibited for sale; the Sibyl-like looks of the gipsy women; the wondering crowd, half-terrified and half-ascinated, in its thousand varieties of costume, ever changing their grouping and aspect with the changing movements of the wearers—altogether formed a picture such as is only met with in the lands of the children of the sun.

The excitement of the scene seemed to restore cheerfulness to the

young heiress of the Grand Chamberlain.

Look here, Don Carlos,' said she to her lover, as, after breakfast, they moved forth from the sitting-room to the terrace. 'Look here, and then confess that I am a real fairy. See,' said she, pointing to the opposite side of the river, 'last night that was nothing but a solitude, and—hey, presto!—I wave but my wand, and behold! a city rises as rapidly as the palace of Aladdin.'

But not so magnificent, Therese,' said Clifford, laughing. 'One would seek in vain here for the thousand pillars of marble, or the golden furniture which was the handiwork of the slaves of the lamp.'

'Pshaw! what matters that? I would wager my rosary that my creation is the more picturesque of the two; and what beauty in architecture is equal to picturesqueness? Besides, my spells have only begun to work. Wait till you see the result, and then, most critical sir, you may doubt my power if you can.'

The young lady was at this moment interrupted by her waitingmaids, who came to announce that a gipsy woman had arrived in Segovia, who had the reputation of a prophetess of the most extraordinary powers. According to the account of the excited damsels, the things which she foretold were more wonderful and more deMANUELA. 225

lightful than ever had been prophesied before. She was not only. like common seers, able to announce whether a girl should be married or not, but she could describe the features, the person, the dress, nay, it was whispered, even the very name of the future spouse. Such, at least, had been the information communicated to them by the servants of the governor, and they now entreated their lady to use her influence with Don Juan, and obtain permission for the prophetess to be introduced.

Therese looked at Clifford and smiled.

'The spell,' whispered she, 'is working. Well, girls,' continued the young lady, turning to her attendants, 'the curiosity is an idle one, nevertheless it is natural, and I will not thwart it. Nay, I will even confess that I share it myself. When the witch has told you your fortunes send her hither. I would fain learn mine.'

Agreeably to the wishes of Donna Therese the governor gave the necessary orders, the gipsy was admitted, and shortly after was introduced to the chamber of the young heiress. Clifford had left it. 'You would embarrass her,' Therese had said to her lover.

'When we meet, we must meet alone.'

The woman who entered might have been about thirty, but sorrow had written its lines deep upon her cheek, and she looked ten years older. She was dressed in the common costume of her tribe—a crimson kirtle, or short petticoat, connected above with a bodice of black velvet, vandyked at the edges, and coming four inches below the waist. Her neck was bare, save where it was protected by a large handkerchief tied loosely round it, while another of crimson silk was fastened under the chin, and covered her head. The dress was very short, and displayed a gracefully-formed foot and ankle, clothed in light blue stockings and a low, silver-buckled shoe. She carried a basket in her hand, full of ribands and laces, and other articles necessary to female adornment.

So long as the servant who introduced her was in the room, she stood motionless by the door; but no sooner was it closed than she dropped her basket, and advancing hastily to Therese fell upon her knees, and kissed frequently and with passionate earnestness the young girl's hand, pressing it at intervals against her forehead and

heart.

'I see you once more, senorita,' said she, in a low, soft voice. 'My eyes are blessed by being permitted to look on you again.'

'And you, my poor Manuela,' said the girl, 'how does it fare with you? It is but two years since we met, and ah, Manuela, continued she, shaking her head as if in remonstrance, 'the hand, not of time, but of sorrow has been heavy on you. Why should you thus ever-

mourn? For you, life may have still many happy years.'

'For me, lady,' said the gipsy, 'life is over. For me, there is neither joy in its joy, nor sorrow in its sorrow; I breathe with scarce the consciousness of existence, I move with scarce the knowledge of the motion.' 'And why should it be so? Why should there not come peace over your heart? Why do you not seek aid of Holy Church?'

Lady, I wish not to offend, but my faith is not as yours. To the women of my race there is but one principle and one virtue their chastity. So long as that remains to them they live. When they have it not they die.'

'Say not so,' said the young girl. 'Great as your trials have 'Never! There is been, the blessed Virgin might relieve them.'

but one relief for them, and that is the grave.'

'And yet prayer—'

'Lady, I pray not. Why should I pray? If there be indeed a Great Spirit above the sky, he can justly claim worship only where he confers benefits; and what have I and my race received at his hands but evil?' 'Alas, alas!' said Therese, wringing her hands,

'what a fearful state of mind is this!'

'Nay, I meant not to grieve you; but if you would listen to your servant, let us not talk of these things. Between my belief and the stories that your priests tell you, there is a gulf which neither you nor I can pass. I pray you then speak not of them, but say in what can I pleasure you. You have sent for me, and I and my tribe exist but to obey you.'

Therese appeared embarrassed, and over her cheek the colour

went and came, changeful as an April hour.

The clear eye of the gipsy remarked the thoughts as they chased each other over the ingenuous countenance before her, and read them well. To one so practised in discovering the secrets of human nature, the text was not difficult.

'They told me, lady,' said she, 'that you wished to have your fortune told, but I believed it not. You can read the future as well as I; for you know that our future is precisely that which we build for ourselves. Again I ask, therefore, why have you sent for me?

Once more Therese coloured and hesitated.

'Then, lady,' said the gipsy, 'I must tell what you will not speak. The stranger who was your companion on the road, and whom we took captive to the Moorish tower, is young, is brave, is beautiful, and you love him.'

Again Therese blushed deeply.

'He is a prisoner here,' continued the gipsy, 'and you would set Is it not so?' Once more the cheek of the young him free.

heiress flushed; but the lips said nothing.

'It is so, and it should be so. He saved you from death, and worse than death,' said Manuela, and she shivered as she spoke, 'and you would be a traitress and ungrateful unless you saved him. Again, lady, I ask, have I not spoken the truth?' Therese looked timidly at her companion and nodded.

'Well, if it is so the matter cannot be difficult; for you have gold,

and we have cunning.

'Would you effect his escape,' said Therese, 'as you secured his entrance at the city gate? Would you once more stain him black, and give him the dress and the appearance of the Zincali?

Manuela shook her head. 'It might be suspected,' said she, 'we

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must devise another plan.' She paused for a minute, and then added: 'He must go down the rock.'

'It is a fearful risk, Manuela,' said the young heiress, as she paled

at the thought.

'It will need a stout heart,' replied the gipsy; 'but the eyes that blenched not at the pass of the Bocca Chica need not fear to look upon the rock of the Alcazar of Segovia.'

'And how would you effect it? By a ladder of rope?'

Manuela was again silent, as if in thought. 'It will not do,' said she at length. 'The ladder, unless it were of silk, would be too heavy. We could not introduce it without suspicion into the fortress. But now that I understand your wishes, I will go and consult with Perez. He has a better head than myself, and can no doubt devise the means. By to-morrow morning I will return.'

And the gipsy retired.

Therese communicated to Clifford the result of the interview, and they agreed to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Gitano. Indeed there was little choice, as only those on the outside could form an accurate judgment of the difficulties, or the mode in which they were to be overcome. From the terrace, no doubt, might be had a general view of the precipice below; but its descent was occasionally broken by masses of rock which threw themselves forward, and intercepted the eye. What perils existed beneath the projecting crags remained unknown, and yet upon that knowledge depended the flight and its success. To a spectator on the outside, on the contrary, the whole exterior surface of the cliff was distinctly discernible, and with the obstacles thus brought face to face there existed, to a certain extent, the means of overcoming them. To Perez, therefore, and his ingenuity, they agreed to trust for the development of the plan and its details.

Their zealous agent seemed to lose no time in commencing his new duties. The two lovers, as might naturally have been expected, passed the forenoon in anxious observation on the terrace; and they remarked that a slight change had taken place in the arrangements of the swarthy-coloured population opposite. In the morning the horses and mules had been brought down to the river in a drove, or conducted by a dozen different hands; they now, as the mid-day sun became powerful, came again to water, but only one at a time; and the quick eye of Clifford remarked that the successive animals were always ridden by the same man; and a little further observation satisfied him that that man was Perez. As the beast drank at the stream, he observed too that the rider, instead of busying himself about the doings of his quadruped, sat lazily on his back, gazing with a sleepy, half-stupid look at the precipice which arose from the opposite bank. The manœuvre, for the animals were numerous, was again and again repeated, and still the same dreamy, indifferent eye glanced over the fortress and its rocky base. At length the man was apparently satisfied; for once more the animals came down in numbers, and under the charge of several hands.

On the following morning Manuela was again admitted, and without difficulty, to the apartment of the young heiress. In Spain love and superstition are universal; and as full nine-tenths of the fairer portion of the population ever have been in the habit of consulting sorceresses of the gipsy tribe upon affairs of the heart, no importance was attached to what was considered the very natural curiosity of Donna Teresa.

No sooner was Manuela alone with the young heiress, than she informed her that Perez had been successful, but she added that everything would depend upon the young caballero understanding thoroughly his instructions, as the smallest error in carrying them out would necessarily be fatal. She expressed, therefore, a wish to see him herself. In this too there was no difficulty. Men in the early part of the eighteenth century indulged their curiosity in endeavouring to pry into the future as well as women. Even in educated England, Sir Roger de Coverley is represented in the 'Spectator as listening to the prophecies of a dark-eyed sibyl in the gipsy garb; and in Spain the fashion universal amongst the fair sex was by no means uncommon in their usually less credulous brethren

As soon, therefore, as Therese had ascertained from Manuela the general outline of the plan to be adopted, she summoned one of the servants, and informing him that the fortune-teller had a wish to try her power over the stranger caballero, ordered him to conduct her to Clifford's apartment. Thither Manuela accordingly made her way; and as soon as they were alone, communicated to the young soldier the observations of Perez.

They were little satisfactory. The Gitano had indeed come to the conclusion that the descent was possible; but he did not the less express his opinion that it was to the last degree hazardous, and might not improbably be attended with the loss of life. But Clifford was obstinate. He had made up his mind to the venture; and he anxiously noted down the precautions which Perez had suggested in the event of its being undertaken. When these had been thoroughly mastered, he announced himself ready for the enterprise. A week, however, seemed likely to elapse before any attempt would be made at escape, as it had been decided to conceal the plans in contemplation, not only from the Alcayde, but from the Grand Chamberlain; and certain preparatory arrangements were necessary. These, however, were more rapid in their progress than had been anticipated. On the evening of the fifth day it was already possible to calculate the period of their completion; and with a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye, Therese told Clifford to hold himself ready for the 22nd.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE BETROTHAL.

THE eventful day had arrived at last. It was the 22nd day of November, and eight o'clock in the evening. In the suite of apartments appropriated to the Duke of Escalona, and which formed a portion of those formerly occupied by royalty, was one, which, in its appearance and furnishings, offered probably little change from the aspect which it had presented in the days of King Alonzo. It was a room of considerable size, whose unplastered walls were clothed with tapestry of great age, representing the loves of Don Pedro the Cruel and Maria de Padilla. In one portion of the hangings the frail dame was represented seated like a queen in the midst of her ladies, whilst the king himself placed a chaplet of flowers upon her head. In another she was on horseback, in a forest, while her lover, who stood by the side of her steed, offered to her admiration a goshawk which he held upon his fist. In a third, she appeared as Minerva, clothed in mail, while Don Pedro, also fully armed, presented her with a sword. The figures were ill done: at least, if any reliance was to be placed on the truthfulness of the representation of the artist, there was nothing in the countenance of the fair enslaver of royalty, which could have led a spectator to believe that she could have broken a queen's heart, and ruined a kingdom. Time, too, had perhaps lent its aid; for the hangings had borrowed additional disfigurement from damp and the lapse of years. The rest of the furniture consisted of some clumsy carved cabinets of oak, and chairs of the same material, bearing evidence of their antiquity in their straight legs, pointed backs, and formal outlines.

The apartment would have been to the last degree dreary in its character, but for an immense fireplace amply supplied with timber; and beside the cheerful blaze which burst from its deep recesses

sat a young man and a dark-eyed girl.

They were Clifford and Therese. For some days past, the duke had been sufficiently well to leave his bedroom during the forenoon; but he always retired with daylight, and the two cousins were left to spend the evenings alone. For though Clifford, from respect to the old man's prejudices, and to those of the country, always ascended to his own apartment prior to the retirement of the Grand Chamberlain, yet since the intimacy that had almost, in spite of themselves, sprung up between himself and Therese, he generally contrived to find his way back to the sitting-room; and there did the two relatives spend the long evenings till the hour of ten and the approach of his gaoler warned the captive once more to return to his solitary prison.

And now he was enjoying her society perhaps for the last time. In a few hours, he was about to engage in an enterprise that might cost him his life; and the consciousness of that and of his approaching departure, threw a gloom over the spirits of the two occupants

of the room. What also contributed to their embarrassment was the formal bearing which, for some days past, they had adopted towards each other. In Clifford, it had sprung from an anxiety not to take advantage of his fair cousin's enforced neighbourhood by pressing attentions, which his pride or his fears suggested to him were unwelcome. In Therese, the reasons were more obvious. To say the truth, she had become insensibly attached to her new-found relative. The beauty of his person might have had something to do with the feeling, for where upon earth is the prude who is not at her heart's core a very woman? But this was not the sole, nor was it even the main attraction. For a woman to love—really to love—she must love one who is superior to herself. Where it is otherwise, there is ever, more or less, the consciousness of patronage, and patronage is inconsistent with respect.

And no one felt this more than the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain. She had inherited, with the energy of her father's family, the cultivated mind and talents of her mother's; and it was the union of the powerful will and the powerful intellect which had preserved her heart unscathed in the gay circles of the Court of France, where so much existed which would have been attractive to a feebler spirit. In Clifford, for the first time, she found united qualities calculated at once to create her admiration and respect; and she loved him the more easily, because in these, so necessary for securing her affections, he was without a rival.

But while she thus yielded to a sentiment she was unable to resist, she was not the less conscious of its danger and its hopelessness; and it was from the conjoint influence of these two feelings—the love and the dread of loving—that originated her present conduct. Maidenly pride induced her to do her best to conceal her favourable sentiments from their object, while a no less honourable feeling rendered her equally anxious to avoid exciting hopes which were not likely to be realized.

Both then were cold, at least in manner; both were embarrassed, and both silent, for the crisis of the approaching separation had suggested to each that words were alike dangerous to utter or to listen to.

A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, and still each sat gazing at the fire, as if, in the fitful flashes of its flame, they could read the story of their future destiny. But the long-continued silence became, at length, more painful even than language. It was so at least to Therese, and in a tone that affected a gaiety the speaker did not feel, she said: 'Well, Charles, the eventful night has come at last.' There was no answer.

'You do not speak,' continued she. 'And yet I should have thought that the prospect of escaping from captivity might have given you a more cheerful aspect!' Again there was no reply.

'What, senor contrabandista, said Therese, with a smile, 'will you persist in concealing your thoughts as you concealed your wares? Is not the bird, I ask, glad to escape from its cage?'

'Not,' said Clifford, in a low tone, 'if it leave its mate behind it.' Therese coloured.

'The representatives,' said she, 'of high and mighty princes have nothing to do with kith or kindred. Their hearts are, or should be,

wrapped up in the success of their diplomacy.'

'Mine was finished on the night I was arrested. I have already done my best to fulfil the instructions of my superiors, and, as far as my public duties are concerned, am entitled to await the future in honourable captivity.'

'And yet to-night you go down the rock!'

'I do; but not for diplomacy.'

'I know it. I did but jest. It is to save the life of my poor

grandfather.'

'You are wrong again, Therese. The duke is my relative, and I would gladly set him free; but I risk life and limb to-night, not for him, but for you.'

The young girl was silent for a while, as if from embarrassment.

'It matters little,' at length continued she. 'We are both grate-

ful! Oh, how can we repay you?'

- 'I ask it of neither,' replied Clifford. 'I have no right to ask it of the duke, for what I do, I do not for his sake: nor do I ask it of you, for I have seen enough to know that I should expect in vain a return.' 'It is ungenerous to say so!'
- 'It is just. I cannot risk life more at the rock of the Alcazar of Segovia than I did at the Bocca Chica; and how was I repaid? You left me without bidding me adieu.' 'Unkind! You know it was to save you from the hands of the Cardinal!'

'I know it was to deprive me of that which I valued more than

the absence of his bonds!'

'Do you hold liberty so cheap, then?' 'No; but I hold the thanks of Donna Teresa Pacheco at a higher value.'

'Such would not be the common mode of judging!'

'Such, at least, is mine; and if you would content a human being, you must give him what he thinks happiness, and not what is deemed happiness by others.'

Therese was agitated. 'You are angry with me, Charles!' said

she. 'You think that I am ungrateful!'

'I am not angry—I have no right to be angry; for, I will do you that justice, you have never, in language or manner, led me to hope.'

- 'But you think me ungrateful?' 'Again I answer, I do not say so. I am not entitled to estimate the price at which a young lady holds her happiness or her honour. There are some who would deem that he who had preserved both had but little claim on their affections, unless, in addition to his other excellences, he possessed also wealth, and rank, and power.'
  - 'Charles!' said the young girl, in a tone of reproach.
    'Therese!' was the reply, but it was uttered coldly.
- 'I cannot,' said she, 'bear the unkindness of your accent or your words! You know the prejudices of my grandfather!'

'I know nothing of the feelings of the duke, nor do I ask; but it is here as at Buitrago. There I ventured to inquire if Donna Teresa Pacheco felt grateful for the services I had rendered her; and there, as here, she replied by informing me of the sentiments of the Duke of Escalona.'

Tears streamed down Therese's cheeks. 'You are cruel, Charles,' said she, in an agitated tone, 'and you reproach me. Yet, how unjust the taunt! To what end to tell of my sentiments, if, whether favourable or not, they must depend upon my grandsire's?'

'And why?—wherefore should they so depend? I am willing to make every allowance for the claims of parentage, or the respect that a child should owe to a parent, yet, pushed beyond certain limits, that respect becomes a slavery, and not a duty. The Grand Chamberlain has wealth. It is his—his inalienable property, and let him do with it what he will. I seek it not of him—I seek but this fair hand,' continued he, as he dropped on his knee beside her, and pressed passionately to his lips the unresisting fingers. 'This is your property—yours only; and I ask of you to give it to me, who have bestowed all upon you.'

Therese made no effort to withdraw the hand, but the tears

streamed down her cheeks.

'And would you,' said she, after a while, 'have me bestow it without the sanction of my parent? You would make me your wife! How could you love—how could you respect me, if I were to be persuaded, even by you, to forget that which you yourself must acknowledge is the first of duties?'

'I hold it not as such. If you love me—if you really love me, your future happiness must depend upon the gratification of my affection; and what right has the duke, if we ask nothing at his hand, to oppose it? My age, my rank, my future prospects, are all such as will do no dishonour to his grandchild. In wealth alone I am your inferior; and if you love me better than the wealth, you will not allow our happiness to be marred by its absence.'

Therese made no answer.

'Do you love me, Therese? Will you not say you love me?' continued he, pressing passionately his lips to the fair fingers.

The tears came fast, but still there was no reply.

Suddenly the young soldier sprang to his feet, and his cheek crimsoned with passion. 'I have erred,' said he, in a bitter tone; 'I have indulged in an idle dream. I have fancied that women could be grateful; but I beg of Donna Teresa Pacheco a thousand pardons for my folly. She has taught me a lesson to the contrary; and I will show my appreciation of it by no longer intruding upon her presence!' and he turned and moved towards the door.

The poor girl sat for a moment as if stupified, and unconscious of his approaching departure; and then, as the thought flashed upon her, she started to her feet, and with trembling steps hurried after him. 'Charles!' said she, in a low tone, as she laid her hand upon

his arm. 'Well!' was the coldly intonated reply.

'You leave me, and in anger?' Clifford still retained his expres-

sion of freezing silence.

'Answer me,' said she, in agitated accents; 'I beseech you, answer me!' 'First answer me,' said Clifford; 'I asked you a question. Therese, I love you better than fame, better than existence; I love you as devotedly as man ever loved woman, and I have asked you the question, "Can you love me in return?"'

He looked at her gravely, almost sternly. The poor girl gazed at him with glistening eyes, and made a feeble attempt to speak, but the lips refused utterance; and staggering forwards, she flung her arms about his neck, and her head sank upon his shoulder. He pressed her to his breast, and again in a low voice whispered in her ear, 'Therese, do you love me?'

'Need you ask?' said she, sobbing; 'if I loved you not, would I suffer your arms to encircle my waist? Would I be where I am now?

Yes, Charles, I do love you; love you fondly—devotedly.'

Again the arms tightened in their embrace; and for a minute nothing could be heard but the throbbing of the kindred hearts.

'And now, love,' said he, as he placed her once more in her chair, and sank on his knees beside her, 'I can with light heart defy the rock, and the Cardinal, and all evils for the future. But why,' continued he, in a tone of gentle reproach, 'why protract my misery so long? why, if you loved me, have you concealed it so carefully?'

'Do I act wisely,' replied Therese, 'in making the avowal now? I fear the prejudices of my grandfather. Were you to insist upon marrying me, in despite of his wishes, you would break my heart;

I could never hear a parent's curse and live.'

'Fear it not, love; you have been generous to me, I will not be less so to you. Should the duke refuse his consent, I will not, while he lives, enforce your pledge. But in the course of years, he must shortly be gathered to his fathers, and I will not permit his parental rights to be carried beyond the grave. If, then, we must wait, we will wait patiently. And I,' continued he, in a gayer tone, 'will in the interim strain every nerve to make the future husband of Donna Teresa Pacheco worthy of her love. But here,' said he, as the sound of drawn bolts came upon his ear, 'come my gaolers, and I must to my crib. So farewell, my dear girl; we will meet in happier times. Remember me in your prayers, and God bless you!'

He passed his arms around her, their lips met in one long mute

embrace, and in another minute Clifford was gone.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE ROCK OF THE ALCAZAR.

The young soldier had re-ascended to his chamber. His spirits, in spite of himself, were depressed; and even the recollections of the past hour did not tend to raise them. How fickle are human beings, how changeable, and how various in their objects! If any one had

told Clifford fourteen days before, that ere long he would be the accepted lover of Mademoiselle de Chalais, and the welcome guest of her father, he would have proclaimed himself the happiest of men. And vet, now that both these events, so intensely desired, had come to pass, his new good fortune, instead of making his felicity complete, only brought with it new anxieties.

Till he had known Therese, he had welcomed danger, for he loved its excitement; but now that he knew her, that he loved her, and had won her love in return, he almost turned back as a coward from perils which were likely to dash the cup of happiness from his lips, and threatened his existence, at the very moment when he first felt

existence valuable.

For an hour, therefore, after he had gained his room, he sat upon his bed moody and despondent; and it was only when eleven chimed from the churches in the town below, that he was recalled to a sense of the duties which he had to perform, and to the recollection that, if he did wish for success in love and ambition, the best mode of assuring its advent was by deserving it. He accordingly extinguished the light, and flinging himself upon the bed, awaited anx-

iously the expected signal.

How slowly the minutes passed, and how impatiently he watched their progress! At length came the appointed hour. The hammers of the great clock of the cathedral pealed midnight, and Clifford at once sprang to his feet. With a trembling hand he undid the latch of the window and opened it. At that moment, as he was about to descend, he heard the measured tread of armed men. 'They are about to change the watch,' said he to himself; 'I will wait till it be passed.' Apparently he was right, for shortly after came upon the ear the challenge of the sentinel; then once more was heard the tread of the patrol, and then all was silent. Again Clifford approached the window: he moved out, lowered himself till his full height was suspended by his hands, and then dropped on to the terrace.

He now for the first time ventured to breathe freely, and looked around him. The night was dark, and the wind which had risen towards sun-down, added to its gloom, for the clouds which it swept before it covered the face of the young moon, and made still more feeble her feeble beams. In the windows of the old castle not a light was stirring, and a high wall at either extremity threw the two ends of the terrace also into shade. On the opposite side of the Eresma, there seemed scarce more sign of life. The camp of the gipsies was dark and silent; one solitary lamp only shone from the windows of the dilapidated farm-house, and gave intimation that its tenants, at least, were watchful.

'All goes well yet,' said Clifford to himself. 'That light shows Perez is at his post. I must now to mine.'

With these words he proceeded to address himself to his desperate enterprise.

It has already been mentioned that the two rivers, the Eresma

and the El Clamores skirted the castle to the north and south, and joined their waters at its north-west angle. From either stream, near the point of junction, the rock rose perpendicularly to the height of several hundred feet. But as the rivers receded from each other, the tongue of land between them became broader, and its sides less precipitous; the upper part of the descent only being composed of crag, while below the rock was occasionally broken into shelves or steep banks, covered with turf. Such was the case at the extreme end of the terrace, which abutted upon the great court in front of the donjon tower, and from which the castle entered. There the cliff sunk from the edge of the parapet to a depth only of seventy or eighty feet, where its downward course was arrested by a projecting ledge. This was about twelve feet square, and towards its outer edge grew a small stunted oak, which had forced its roots into the crevices of the rock, and drew a scanty nourishment from the ungrateful soil. Below, the ground again sunk perpendicularly, but only to the depth of about thirty feet, while beneath, the descent, though still steep, sloped away to the river, in banks covered with turf and low brushwood.

It was at this point, where the ledge projected from the cliff, and broke it into two unequal parts, that Perez had determined should take place the escape of Clifford. The descent of the upper precipice was to be accomplished by means of a silk ladder; while for the lower, little elevated as it was, a single rope was held sufficient. and this, it was proposed, should be raised from below by a slender line, to be wound round the waist till its services were needed. In furtherance of this scheme, Manuela, who paid daily visits to the castle, under pretence of selling female finery, had at intervals introduced a quantity of silk cords. These Therese had put together during the night, and afterwards concealed the connected fragment in one of the old wardrobes which decorated her apartment, and from this, in the early part of the evening, the incidents of which we have recorded in the last chapter, they had been removed by Clifford, who deposited them in a stone pavilion, or summer-house, which terminated one end of the terrace.

Such had been the preparations made for the drama of the night. We must now return to him who was to play the principal part in it. The young soldier, as it may be recollected, had safely gained the terrace, and had lingered for a moment to ascertain the repose of the inmates of the castle, and the watchfulness of his gipsy comrade. All was of good augury, and with stealthy steps he made his way to the pavilion. From this he removed the precious coil, dragged it to the foot of the parapet wall, and passed the loop which formed the upper end of the ladder, over one of the vases which projected from the stone-work. This done, he allowed the silken net to drop gently over the face of the cliff.

All was now ready, but still he moved not, and for the first time appeared to hesitate; for he gazed wistfully over the precipice, as if he would have traced his future path amidst its darkness. It was

in vain. His eye could read nothing in the gloomy depths below, and in spite of himself he shivered.

The weakness, however, was but momentary.

'Pshaw!' said he, 'it is my profession to face death, and how could I meet it in a nobler cause?'

With the words he put his foot upon the ladder; but he instantly withdrew it, and with a throbbing heart, for at that moment, the wind swept along the face of the rock, and as the light silken cord was caught in its eddies, it was whirled like chaff before it. But the gust passed as rapidly as it came, and Clifford once more put his

foot upon the step.

The weight seemed to steady the slender cords, and for it might be twenty feet the young soldier descended in safety, but his danger increased as he approached the platform. There the cliff receded, and the wind as it swept along its concave surface, whirled round and round the ladder. Clifford's head swam, his eyes closed, and for a moment he felt that he was lost, but the blast swept by, and the ladder was once more steady. As soon as he had recovered himself, he hurriedly continued the descent, till, at length, his foot felt the welcome pressure of rock beneath.

He believed that he had reached the projecting ledge, but it was still too dark to enable him to ascertain the fact by eyesight; he had nothing for it, therefore, but to cling to the ladder and with one foot on its step to explore the ground near him. It was fortunate he had taken this precaution, for though the foot which, like the dove from the ark, had been sent forth on a voyage of discovery, rested at first upon firm ground, it immediately after, on his advancing it a little, went over the edge of the precipice, and the jerk was so sudden from the weight of his body, that he had nearly followed it.

'I understand it now,' said he, as he once more recovered himself, and had his two feet firmly planted on the silken step. 'I understand it now. The wind has carried the ladder to the verge of the

ledge: I must try the other side.'

He did so, and with better success. For there the horizontal mass extended itself beyond the exploring toe, and there, after sundry

experiments, the young soldier deposited himself in safety.

For some time he lay motionless, for his head and nerves had to a certain degree lost their firmness, and he felt giddy; but the chill air of a November night soon revived him, and made him conscious of his position, and the necessity for further action.

It was not easy. The ledge was not above twelve feet square, and upon three sides it dropped perpendicularly towards the river. On one only, that at which Perez awaited him, was the descent sufficiently small to be covered by his rope. Fortunately for his perplexities, the heavens cleared for a minute, and the young soldier had a distinct view of his locality, and a just idea of the danger of his enterprise.

His first glance was to the ladder, or rather to the place which he knew it occupied, for with one foot he still touched its cords. It

had been as he expected. The wind had carried the light and slender ropes off their perpendicular line, to the very edge of the cliff. Had they diverged two feet more, Clifford must have been lost. Fervently did he thank Heaven for his safety, and once more proceeded to reconnoitre his ground. On the right, a few feet off, was the old oak-tree. To this, as his most important object, he first crawled, and was able at a glance to guess what portion of its root would bear his weight. It was fortunate that he had lost no time in making the scrutiny, for immediately after, dark vapours again swept across the sky, and everything was once more as black as midnight. He had ascertained, however, the comparative safety of his position, and he ventured to sit up, and to unwind the cord which was passed round his waist. This done, he fastened one end of it to the tree, and awaited impatiently the signal.

A quarter of an hour might have elapsed, though to Clifford, occupied as he was from moment to moment in perpetual watchfulness, the time appeared much longer, when a low cry as of an owl came upon his ear. He replied to it by flinging his cord over the cliff, keeping his hand carefully on the upper part, in order to ascertain if any one grasped it below. One minute passed—two—three—five—and yet there was nothing to intimate to him that it had arrived at its intended destination. 'They cannot find the small line in the dark,' said he to himself, 'or have I thrown it over the wrong face of the cliff?—but, ha! yes; there is a jerk, sure enough.'

In fact, at that instant, a sudden pull from beneath intimated to him that the lower end of the cord was in friendly hands. For two minutes the line remained motionless, and then another jerk gave him a fresh signal. It was understood; and Clifford once more recoiled his line, bringing along with it the heavier rope, which was intended for his own descent, and this in its turn was fastened round the tree.

This portion of the undertaking had been the subject of his least forethought, and yet it was the most dangerous. Like most landsmen, he had been little accustomed to hold on by his arms, and he had great difficulty in supporting his weight, notwithstanding the aid given to his knees by knots made for that purpose on the rope. Besides which, the wind had increased to a gale, and as it drove the cord and its burden backwards and forwards along the face of the cliff, his hands became lacerated, and the streaming blood added fresh difficulty to his giving firmness to his grasp. At length, as his head and bodily power were alike failing him, he felt the touch of fingers on his foot, and in another minute was in the arms of his guide.

'Bravo, senor,' said the Gitano, 'I am thankful to see you safe, and yet I little expected it, for since the wind rose, it would require a bold cragsman to come down the face of that rock, even by daylight. But what is this?' continued he, as his companion sank to the ground. 'It is a mere swoon; and this is the best cure for it.'

As he spoke, he produced from his pocket a flask of brandy, and

applied it to Clifford's lips. The effect of the liquor was to a certain degree restorative, and yet so thoroughly stupefied was the young soldier, that he was unable to walk without aid, and the gipsy half-supporting, half-leading him, made his way towards the foot of the hill.

The ground, though no longer rocky, was still steep and broken, and not unfrequently Clifford and his guide lost their footing. Still, however, they proceeded in their descent, and had nearly reached the bottom when Perez, who, in his anxiety to assist his companion, had forgotten the proper attention to his own security, slipped, and fell at full length. His gun chanced to be slung at his back, and as he rolled on the ground, a branch of brushwood caught the trigger, and the piece went off. Fortunately, neither himself nor his companion were injured, but the report at once attracted the attention of the sentry overhead, and whether from suspicion of what had happened, or for the purpose of giving the alarm, he fired off his musket, apparently aiming at the spot from whence the sound proceeded; for a ball whistled through the branches, and flattened itself against an adjoining rock.

"That's not a bad shot, senor,' said Perez, laughing. 'But come, make haste, for we shall have the whole of the castle astir in five minutes, and if we do not be off immediately we are lost men.'

Clifford muttered something about his inability to move, and

faintly told Perez to leave him, and make his escape alone.

'No, no,' said the Gitano, 'that would never do.' What would the senorita say? I should never dare to face her again. Come; we

are not ten yards from the foot of the hill.'

As he spoke, he continued his way, dragging rather than leading after him his exhausted companion. A few steps fortunately brought them to the bottom of the bank, and they found themselves in a narrow strip of open meadow bounded by the Eresma. Towards this the Gitano hurried his companion, and with him plunged into the water. Fortunately, it was not much more than knee-deep; though the strength of the current, and the sliminess of the stones which formed its bed, made their progress difficult and slow.

At length they reached the opposite bank, and both turned involuntarily to look at the fortress, now for the first time visible. It was evidently in a state of great excitement, for loud cries were heard, and lights hurriedly appeared and disappeared at its numerous windows. Almost at the same moment, a bright flash was seen from one of the embrasures of the outer wall, followed by a loud report.

'Ay,' said Perez, 'there goes the cannon announcing the escape of a prisoner, but it is too late. It is difficult to lay finger upon the Zincalo when he has the sky overhead and the turf under foot.'

He whistled as he spoke. The signal was immediately replied to in a similar fashion, and a man rode up, leading a mule on either side of him.

'Come, senor,' said the Gitano, 'here is your old friend the

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Duchessa. She has done you good service before now, and must

again. So put foot in the stirrup and mount.'

Clifford was unable to make the required exertion; but Perez and his companion succeeded in lifting him to the saddle, placing him between them so as to be able to support him in case of increasing weakness; and the whole party moved off at speed in the direction of the Somo Sierra. Rapidly did the fortress and its lights disappear behind them. But still, and for many a long mile, there came upon the ear, though fainter and more faint, the distant sound of the heavy gun, as from the prison rock it heralded to the surrounding country that a captive had escaped from its walls.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

JOSÉ.

THERESE was once more in Madrid. Three days had elapsed since Clifford's escape. It is needless to say with what anxiety she had watched its progress. As soon as her lover had left her, she retired to her bedroom, but not to sleep; there was too much dependent upon the chances of the few succeeding hours to make rest possible. To evade suspicion, however, she extinguished her lamp; she then withdrew the window curtains, and gazing through its closed casements, endeavoured to peer into the darkness. There was nothing visible save the solitary light in the gipsy camp. Yet to Therese, no star in the firmament would have been half so welcome, for to her, as to her lover, it announced that Perez was on the alert, and that the arrangements for the flight were already in progress.

When the hour of midnight pealed from the cathedral, her anxieties became redoubled, and to support herself she was fain to lean against the window-frame. Shortly after, a dark shadow passed before the glass, and then for half-an-hour all was silent. How slowly its minutes passed. In that half-hour, to the young girl, was comprised an eternity. All at once her dream was broken by the report of a musket. Then followed hurried cries, then the bolts of the outer hall were drawn, and lights flashed under her door, and steps were heard ascending to Clifford's room. What was the misery of that moment! Had they seized him, and once more led him back to captivity? Worse still, perhaps: he might be wounded—murdered!

But there was little time for speculation. In another instant the steps were heard descending the stairs, and then came shouts, and oaths, and curses; and then the whole building shook, as the heavy cannon spoke in thunder from the battlements. It was the signal of the prisoner's escape. Was he after all really free? The question had scarcely been propounded to her own heart, when it was answered. From the ruined building on the hill-side opposite, shone forth at once three lights. They blazed fiercely for an instant, and then died away. It was the agreed-upon signal of

success, and Therese sank upon her knees, and thanked Heaven for

the great deliverance.

On the following morning it is easy to understand the excitement which prevailed in the castle. The first act of the governor was to despatch at daybreak a courier to the Cardinal, to acquaint him with the escape of his prisoner. The next was to send out a small body of horse to scour the country and neighbourhood, and more especially to bring before him some of the leading gipsies, whom Don Juan Sanchez shrewdly suspected of being concerned in the occurrences of the past night. The expedition was in every way unfortunate. No traces could be found of the English envoy; nor even, strange to say, of the Gitanos. The sun had set upon a canvas city. Its first rays rose upon a solitary forest, where the only traces of former inhabitants were to be found in the charred wood and cinders, which had marked the site of their fires.

Baffled in his first efforts, the alcayde next directed his investigation to those within his own walls. But this scrutiny was not more successful than the other. The Duke of Escalona stated. with his usual frankness, that he had not only lent no aid to the prisoner's flight, but had not even known that any idea of escape was contemplated; and the old noble was believed at once, for his word was known to be as good as his bond. A stricter investigation was then set on foot amongst the domestics, but that, too, was fruitless, for they had never been trusted, and knew nothing. As for Donna Teresa, her youth and her high rank placed her, if not beyond the pale of suspicion, at least beyond that of questioning. The old soldier in command of the fortress at any rate said nothing, but the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain speedily came to the conclusion that, in his private thoughts, Don Juan Sanchez believed her to be a participator in the preparations for the flight; for his manner, once so courteous, had become cold, distant, almost uncivil.

It mattered little, the great event had been accomplished, and Therese felt that her presence was required elsewhere. Without, therefore, mentioning to her grandfather any particulars of the plans to be adopted, she suggested that her time might be employed at Madrid more beneficially for his interest than at Segovia. The duke assented. His health was so much improved, that the attentions of his grandchild were no longer necessary; and he was the more willing to give his sanction to her departure, as he too had remarked the change in the manners of the alcayde, and though he said nothing, perchance guessed at the grounds for it.

Therese, therefore, had once more taken up her residence in her father's house at Madrid. She found there, as usual, Donna Violante; but she was no longer a welcome guest. Her ward could not help suspecting that the duenna had something to do with the calamity of the banqueting-room, and treated her old friend with extreme coldness. Donna Violante's conscience probably suggested to her the cause of so sudden a change from familiarity to dislike, for she asked no explanations, and took refuge in her own apartment.

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The sudden alienation, painful though it was, had nevertheless in some respects its advantages. It gave Therese a clearer field for operations. It was necessary for her to concert with Clifford in private their future plans; and this would have been impossible had her old intimacy with her duenna still existed, and Donna Violante exercised, as formerly, the right of entering at all hours the private sitting-room of the young lady, or being her constant companion when she went abroad.

So far, then, all was well. One difficulty was removed, and it was possible for her, either at home or elsewhere, to see Clifford without interruption. Another, and not less formidable, still existed, and that was how to communicate with him, or summon him to an interview. Under these circumstances, Therese decided on calling in the aid of an old servant of the family, of the name of José.

José had been the confidential domestic of her father. He had been a soldier from his boyhood; and on the Count of Gormas first joining the army had been sent by the old duke to act as a sort of Mentor to his heir. He had faithfully discharged the duty, had followed his young master in all his campaigns, and received him in his arms when he fell in Piedmont, at the battle of Turin, so disastrous to the Spanish monarchy. He had ever since become a sort of appendage to the house of Pacheco, and spent his time in

doing anything or nothing, as best pleased him.

But whatever were José's good qualities, there was one for which he was more especially distinguished, and that was his discretion The Count of Gormas, it was alleged, was in his campaigns rather disposed to forget fair faces at home, in his admiration of those abroad; and the countess, though the best of all possible wives, condescended to be remarkably jealous. To ascertain if her fears were well founded, many were the questions asked, and many the bribes offered, to his faithful attendant. It was in vain. José was impenetrable; he had seen nothing, he had heard nothing. No stock, or stone, or lump of clay could, according to his own account, be more unconscious of what was passing around him. The consequence was, that José became famous. His name, in the family at least, passed into a proverb, and to say, 'You might as well try to get anything out of José,' was to say that it was impossible.

Therese, without being aware of the precise circumstances which had founded so great a reputation, had a thousand times heard the phrase, and it now occurred to her, that a caballero so distinguished for his silence, was the very person to be employed upon a mission in which silence was the first quality necessary. She accordingly ordered the old man's attendance, and having informed him that she wished to communicate privately with a cavalier upon matters connected with her grandfather, entrusted him with a note to Clifford. José had orders to deliver it without delay, to await an answer, and more especially to say nothing on the subject to any one. The veteran made his usual military salaam, received the precious packet, and without even looking an inquiry, departed. The missive was ad-

dressed—'Senor Zuniga, to the care of Don Jamy Gonzales, Calle de la Cabeza.'

The young gentleman for whom it was intended was once more established in his original quarters. Luckily they had never been discovered by the agents of the Cardinal; and by a further piece of good fortune, he had left in them all the important documents connected with his mission on the calamitous day which had witnessed his apprehension in the house of the Grand Chamberlain. Prior to leaving Segovia, it had been arranged between him and Therese that he should once more occupy his former abode, and that he should be addressed by herself, or known to any of the neighbours who might see him enter or leave his apartment, by the name of his mother's family; a name which was not only sufficient for continuing his incognito, but which Therese's heart probably suggested might have some power over her grandfather's prejudices. The Grand Chamberlain was proud of being a Pacheco; but, as his fair relative knew well, he was still more proud of his descent from the chivalrous Zuniga, the celebrated Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava, in the days when the Grand Master of a military order was the equal

Clifford had recovered his health and spirits. Such at the time, however, had been the effect of the blows which he had received when driven against the rock, that nothing but the constant care of Perez and his fellow Gitano had prevented him falling from his saddle on the night of his flight. His conductors, nevertheless, had succeeded in transporting him in safety to a rude hut, belonging to one of the tribe, amid the ranges of the Somo Sierra, and about four leagues distant from the scene of his captivity. There, for two days, he recruited himself. On the morning of the third, the fugitive's strength returned, and though his hands still exhibited traces of past suffering, he was in other respects able to resume active life. He had accordingly started for Madrid. He had no fears of discovery, for the dye of the gipsy had again been at work, and the fairhaired and fair-skinned Englishman had under its influence received the darker tint of Andalusia. Further to aid deception, he was equipped like a Spanish gentleman arriving from a journey, and provided with a long gun and ample saddle-bags; while Perez himself resumed the profession of arriero, and affected the muleteer in attendance upon the traveller.

On the evening of the third day, then, after having made a considerable circuit, the young envoy and his companion once more entered the city, but by the Toledo road. They passed unquestioned. The hour selected for approaching the gate had been that of sundown, when the natural obscurity increased the difficulty of recognition, and the chill of a November night drove all but the soldier on duty within the guard-house. On reaching the Haymarket, and having arranged with Perez the means of communication through a woman of his tribe who lived in the neighbourhood, he made his way on foot to the Calle de la Cabeza. The preconcerted signals

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were given, the door opened, and Clifford was once more in his old

quarters.

It was about nine o'clock on the following day that José made his appearance. He presented his credentials, and Clifford wrote the reply, accompanying it, as he handed it to the trusty messenger, with a gratuity so handsome that José's usually dull eye sparkled

with pleasure.

'Vaya,' said he to himself, as he pocketed his new funds while he descended the stairs, 'the caballero is liberal, too liberal, I suspect, to be a friend merely of the old man's. I doubt, at least, if he does not think more of my young lady than of her grandfather. Well, if Donna Teresa has a lover, it is no matter of mine, and there is not a senorita in Spain better entitled to one. And a Zuniga, too, a relation, no doubt, of the Grand Chamberlain's. Yet who would have thought of his having blue blood in his veins? for, though he be a handsome man enough, he is as dark as a Morisco.'

The aged messenger of Cupid speedily found his way back to the Calle de Toledo, and delivered to his mistress the packet entrusted to him. He would then have retired, but a sign instructed him to remain while, with flushed cheeks, she read the short billet. It contained but three lines, and they merely expressed an assent to the wishes of his correspondent. But it was the first letter from one who was dear to her; and who can ever forget the sensations of

delight with which such first letter is perused?

When its contents had been mastered, Therese looked at her

attendant with embarrassment.

'José,' said she at length, 'your master's life is in danger, and the caballero you saw to-day has engaged to do his best to save it. But it is necessary that he and I should consult together on the best means for effecting this, and without the knowledge of any of the household: for our success will depend upon our secresy. I have decided accordingly on taking you into our councils. Will you aid us?' 'With the last drop of my blood, senorita, should it be necessary. I carried your noble father off the field at the battle of Turin, when many a one would have shrunk from the risk; and what I did for the Count of Gormas, I would do for Donna Teresa Pacheco.'

'I believe you, José. But you must be silent to all—to every one—even to Donna Violante.' 'Nay, senorita,' said the old soldier, 'no one ever heard José speak of what did not concern him. And as for the duenna, saving your presence, I have ever held her something of a parroquet. And now, Donna Teresa, I am an old soldier, and forgive me for saying there is nothing like distinct orders. What am I to do?'

Therese gave the necessary instructions to her punctilious attendant; and having dismissed him, sank into a chair, and abandoned herself to the thousand agreeable reveries which crowd across a young girl's mind when anticipating a meeting with the object of

her affection.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE CASA DEL CAMPO.

The place selected for the interview of Clifford and Therese was a retired spot in the neighbourhood of Madrid.

On the right bank of the Manzanares, and directly opposite the windows of the royal palace, was a country residence of the king, called the Casa del Campo. The building itself was little remarkable, and had been converted into a menagerie for wild beasts—in Spain, as for many centuries in England, considered the appropriate appendage of royalty. The grounds were upon a more extensive scale. They extended for about two miles along the banks of the river, and were adorned with some of the finest timber, particularly of the beech species, in Spain. The avenues were planted, according to the taste of the period, in formal lines, having towards their centre a fountain, the universal accompaniment of Spanish pleasure-grounds, and in front of this stood a magnificent equestrian statue of Philip III.

But, great as was its natural beauty, the park was for the most part solitary and neglected. The population of Madrid loved the bustle of the Prado and the Puerta del Sol; and the Casa del Campo remained untenanted, save at intervals, when the privacy of its woods recommended it to hot-headed gallants as an appropriate spot for settling their private quarrels, or as a rendezvous for lovers

unable to meet in more thronged localities.

Such was the place which had been fixed on by Clifford and Therese for their meeting. The access to it was easy. The entrance was not a hundred yards from the bridge of Segovia, and thither Therese, on the following morning, took her way, accompanied by José. For further protection, private orders had been sent to Perez, and he and a brother of his tribe lingered near the gate. They had with them their mules, and a pretended anxiety to let them out for hire offered the Gitano an excuse for addressing her, and thus giving information upon any subject which might be of interest, while the presence of the animals themselves secured to Clifford the

means of escape, should escape be necessary.

About the same time that the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain proceeded on her route to the rendezvous, ('lifford had started from the Calle de la Cabeza. He found, and without difficulty, the young lady and her attendant near the great fountain, and leaving José to amuse himself as he best might, the lovers sauntered along one of the many alleys with which the place abounded. It is scarcely necessary to hint to our fair readers of the almost delirious joy of the meeting, or the confidences which were mutually exchanged; the narrative by the cavalier of his descent of the rock and his flight; the detail by the girl of her agonized feelings during the time marked by its progress; of her terror at hearing the hurried visit of the guards to Clifford's room; of her joy at seeing the three lights at the gipsy's hut. Yet, amid all their happiness, a graver feeling gradually stole over them, for upon both, almost uncon-

sciously, came the recollection that their enterprise was, in fact, but begun, and that Clifford's escape was valueless to both, unless it were followed by the result to obtain which the escape had been made—the preservation of the life of the Grand Chamberlain. this subject the conversation gradually addressed itself.

first alluded to by Therese.

'And now, Charles,' said she, in reply to an impassioned expression of affection on his part, 'let us be serious. I love you—I have promised one day to be your wife, and to you (may the Virgin forgive me!) have I given the dearest hopes and wishes of my future existence. But I have other duties and other affections, which,' continued she, as she coloured deeply, 'ought perhaps to have My grandfather-my poor been first present to my thoughts. grandfather! his life is in danger. How are we to preserve it?

Clifford shook his head, and looked grave.

'I will not, my dear love,' said he, 'disguise from you that the risk is great. No one knows better than yourself that I was furnished with three different means of accomplishing the ruin of the Cardinal—my letters of credence to the Marquis Scotti, to the father confessor, and to the queen. Two of them have already failed. I have again this morning communicated with the Parmesan ambassador, and reminded him that I had already transmitted to him his master's letter. He will not stir. I suspect he estimates at a higher rate the favour of Alberoni than that of the Duke of The Prime Minister of Spain has more to give than the sovereign of a petty duchy.'

'And he will betray you?' said Therese, anxiously.
'No,' said Clifford; 'that is the only favour he vouchsafes me, for, out of respect to his master, he will be silent. But he will do nothing in my favour, and so vanishes one of the great hopes of my enterprise.'

'And D'Aubenton,' said Therese.

'He too is lost to us: Alberoni told me on the night of our conference that he had renewed his friendship with the confessor, and were it not so, whatever might have been the intentions of the Jesuit, prior to the arrest of the Grand Chamberlain, now they will be adverse to us; for when did the disciples of Loyola aid a falling cause?

Therese clasped her hands mournfully as if she were too well satisfied with the reasons to venture a reply to them. She spoke at length, but in a faint tone.

'But the queen,' said she, 'still remains to you.'

'True; but it is impossible to approach her. The jealousy of her old nurse, Donna Laura Pescatori, is intense, and in virtue of her office as Assa Feta she can exclude whom she will. hoped, indeed, to have secured her favour through her countryman, Scotti, but now that he has given me the cold shoulder, that chance also has failed me, and with it all prospect of winning the queen.'

'Alas! alas!' said Therese 'is there no hope then?'

love,' said her companion, passing his arm tenderly round her, 'there is as yet no reason for despair. The trial, as I learned from my host, is fixed for the seventh of next month, and the duke is not to be removed to Madrid till the sixth. This is but the twenty-sixth of November, so we have still ten days before us; and in the changing atmosphere of court favour, we may possibly in the interim

meet with something like sunshine.'

The lovers separated only to meet again on the following day, but the second interview was as little productive of hope as the first. Clifford had made a fresh attempt to win the favour of the Parmesan ambassador; but he adhered to his cautious policy, and the prospect of an interview with the queen seemed as distant as ever. They could not, however, bring themselves to despair, and a third interview was appointed for the thirtieth, in the hope that, during the interval, some fortunate chance might spring up in their favour; and it was looked forward to with a greater anxiety, as it might possibly be the last; for the two lovers on their return to the fountain were informed by José that he had observed, during their walk in the alley, a man carefully watching them. Who the stranger was he could not tell, nor could he even guess at his probable rank, as he had worn a large mantle and broad-brimmed hat—a costume too general to make the distinctions of class easy to the spectator. It was therefore with a feeling of doubt and anxiety that Clifford and Therese prepared for their next meeting.

The thirtieth came at last, and at mid-day the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain proceeded to the Casa del Campo, accompanied as before by the military attendant of her father. On reaching the gate of the park, to her surprise she found Perez for the first time In one so attached, it was impossible to attribute his nonappearance to neglect or indifference. And yet to ascertain the real cause was equally beyond her power, for the brother Gitano who had been left in charge of the mules either could not or would not give any satisfactory reason for the absence of his chief. With palpitating heart, she took her way to the fountain, and there she found Clifford waiting for her. Yet even his presence did little to relieve her, for he like herself had remarked the absence of the Gitano, and was equally unable to account for it. But the incident was insensibly forgotten, for anxieties, even greater than that connected with the new mystery, naturally took possession of their minds, and after having instructed José to follow at a distance,

they sauntered towards their accustomed alley.

For awhile we must leave them to their tete-à-tete, and return to Perez. It has been already mentioned that the Gitano was in the habit of taking post at the gate, which gave access to the Casa del Campo, but as he feared that he might be an object of suspicion to the authorities, in consequence of the part which he had played in aiding the escape of Clifford, he never made his appearance there till noon, the time fixed by the heiress of the Grand Chamberlain for leaving her home. On the day on which had taken place the

two first meetings between Therese and Clifford, there had been nothing to alarm him, and on the present, as on former occasions, he had, according to custom, taken up his quarters at the usual spot. Scarcely had he reached it, when he was startled by the apparition of a hated form coming from the city and crossing the bridge of Distant as the object still was, the quick eye of the gipsy had no difficulty in recognizing Don Ambrosio. Agitated by the presence of a man who had ever been the harbinger of evil to him and to his tribe, he instantly entered the gate, and took refuge amongst the copse-wood which clothed on either side the extreme boundary of the pleasure-grounds, and there from his place of con-

cealment watched the approach of his old enemy.

Unconscious of observation, the Andalusian entered the park, and took his way leisurely towards the fountain which formed the usual rendezvous of the lovers. Apparently he expected to have found some one in its neighbourhood for he approached cautiously, and on ascertaining its solitude moved slowly round it, peering as he did so down the alleys, which diverged from the fountain as from a common centre. At this moment a new figure appeared on the scene. She was a stout, vulgar-looking woman of about sixty, but notwithstanding her age, her neck was bare and encircled with a string of magnificent pearls, while on her fingers were numerous diamond rings, seemingly of great value. Her dress was somewhat like the Spanish, for a mantilla was on her head, and she carried a large fan. But there the similarity ended. There was no saya of black silk, so universal in the Peninsula. On the contrary, the gown was of gay colours; but though of the richest materials and newest fashion, it was worn with the air of one who had not been accustomed to the finery, at that period of life when the manners and the bearing of the wearer borrow in some degree a permanent character from their garment.

As the new-comer passed near the Andalusian, the splendour of her jewellery caught his eye, and appeared to suggest an idea, for, after a moment's reflection, he abandoned the search in which he had been hitherto occupied; and affecting the air of a lounger, sauntered off, adopting, however, as the scene of his promenade, the avenue down which the portly dame was now moving. Perez, too, followed in his turn. He had dogged his enemy from the park-

gate, and now kept as near him as the covert would permit.

In the mean time, the two lovers had gained the retired avenue which witnessed their daily promenades. Scarcely had they entered it, than they heard a scream-it was clearly a woman's voice, and seemed to proceed from a narrow alley which crossed, at some distance, the greater avenue, but which from the thickness of the brushwood which clothed its edge, was invisible except at the point of contact. Again the scream was heard in a louder tone. Clifford made a sign to José to approach; and having consigned Therese to his charge, hurried forward to ascertain the cause. He was not long in discovering it. On gaining the end of the alley he saw, about a hundred yards to the right, a group whose relative positions at once explained the mystery. By a small tree near the edge of the alley stood a stout, elderly woman. Her mantilla lay upon the ground, her dress was disordered, and her arms were bound to the tree with cords, while near her were engaged two men in mortal combat, and notwithstanding the distance, Clifford had no difficulty in recognizing in them Perez and Don Ambrosio.

He rushed towards them; but ere he could approach, the struggle had terminated. The gipsy had been unable, with his knife, to guard himself against the passes of the sword of the Andalusian; and as Clifford came up, a successful lunge had driven the weapon through the chest of the Gitano, and the poor wretch sank to the ground with a groan. Scarcely had he fallen, when Don Ambrosio became aware of the approach of a third party, and he instantly recognized him.

'Valgame Dios, senor contrabandista,' said he, as a savage joy sparkled in his eyes. 'The saints are favourable to me to-day: to have the happiness of meeting, and at the same moment, both my friends of the Bocca Chica!' 'Murderous ruffian!' shouted Clifford. 'The happiness is mine! You escaped me once—you

shall not do so again!'

'Ho, ho, ho!' said Don Ambrosio, with a taunting laugh. 'The lover of Donna Teresa Pacheco is jealous of a rival, and probably a successful one; for a little bird has whispered in my ear, that Alberoni would pay high for the capture of the contrabandista; and it may be he will not think the damsel's hand too extravagant a price.'

Scoundrel! defend yourself, was the reply. And the swords

crossed instantly.

The parties were equally matched. Dissolute as Don Ambrosio was, he had still all the accomplishments of a Spanish noble, and among these was a perfect command of his weapon; and Clifford speedily found that he would require all his skill. In the first instance, indeed, it appeared that the combat would go against him, for, irritated by the sarcasms of his antagonist, he had lost temper, and exposed himself incautiously. A slight wound, however, on the outside of the sword arm at once recalled his self-control. With his usual sang-froid, returned his power of judgment, and he determined, for a while, to act entirely upon the defensive, and content himself with parrying the lunges of the Andalusian.

In proportion, however, as Clifford recovered calmness, Don Ambrosio lost it. Confident of his superiority, he had in the first instance entertained no doubt of the speedy termination of the contest in his favour, and had signalized with a cry of triumph the lunge which had drawn blood from Clifford's shoulder; but the unexpected protraction of the combat irritated his fiery temper. He became, in turns, angry, excited, desperate, till at length he lost head altogether, and thrust furiously, but without discretion or special object. The extravagant exertion produced its natural

results. His foot became less steady, his wrist less firm, and the attack wavered from pure want of physical strength to continue it.

The exhaustion did not escape his keen-eyed opponent. He had hitherto rested upon the left limb, the head thrown back, the body motionless, and the iron hand ever in front but unchanging in its position, except in the half-curve which, at intervals, it described from the wrist, and with which, as if without an effort, it had baffled the lightning-like movements of the long rapier. As, however, the thrusts became less frequent, and the weakness of his adversary apparent, all at once Clifford gathered himself up as if for immediate action.

'Now, scoundrel!' shouted he, in a voice of thunder, and as his eyes flashed fire, 'now it is my turn! This,' said he, as he passed his sword through the fleshy part of Don Ambrosio's arm, 'this is for the wrongs of Manuela!'

The Andalusian gnashed his teeth with pain.

'This,' continued Clifford, as he once more made the point of his blade felt in the right loin of his opponent—'this is to avenge Perez, and this, Don Ambrosio, is to revenge your outrage upon Donna Teresa Pacheco!"

The words were ominous and may shadow out the result. The hidalgo had made a lunge, but reeling with pain, it had been weak and ill-directed. Clifford parried it with the full strength of his powerful arm; and as the point of the weapon flew up, he seized with his left hand, the Andalusian by the wrist, and with his right, buried his rapier in his throat. Don Ambrosio fell dead.

No sooner was the tragedy over, than he turned to Perez. The poor fellow was still breathing, but it was evident that life was ebbing rapidly. Yet even in his last moments did there live, warm as ever, the passions of his race, for he had watched with an anxious eye the struggle between his old fellow-traveller and his great enemy: and as Clifford approached him, there seemed to pass over his face a slight smile as if of gratitude. But there were others who also had a place in his memory, for his lips stirred; and it seemed to his companion as if he had pronounced the word 'Senorita!'

'She is here, Perez—my poor Perez, she is here!' said Therese, as

she approached, and fell on her knees by his side.

The gipsy took her hand, and faintly and with difficulty raised it to his lips. Scarcely had he done so, than he started as if he had felt the influence of some internal spasm. Almost at the same moment, the blood rushed in torrents from his mouth, the limbs stretched themselves, the eyes dimmed, and the devoted servant of the house of Pacheco lay on the ground a corpse!

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### THE ASSA FETA.

THE causes of the appearance of the Andalusian in a spot destined to be so fatal to him, were simple enough. Ever since his unfortu-

nate adventure at the Somo Sierra, the dissolute hidalgo had deserted the highway. The loss of his horse, a necessary appendage to the highwayman of the eighteenth century, had formed an insuperable bar to his continuing his profession; for his poverty prevented his making an expensive purchase, and nothing but an animal of high blood, with its concomitant excellences, speed and endurance, could enable him to carry on his old trade with safety or success. He had no resource, therefore, but to make his way to the capital, where alike the largeness of the population offered him security, and his skill in games of chance supplied the means of acquiring from time to time funds for existence. It was while so employed, that among other places of casual resort, he had made his way to one of the city gates; and, there, while engaged in conversation with the officer in charge, an acquaintance of his own in better days, he had learned the anxiety of the Cardinal for the capture of the contrabandista. and the reward which was to accompany it. Further questioning led him to the conclusion that the party, in whose arrest Alberoni took so much interest, was his old acquaintance of the Somo Sierra: while his recollection of the terror displayed by Perez, at the chance suggestion thrown out by him that the Gitano was employed as a political agent between the capitals of France and Spain, led him to the further inference that the contrabandista, as well as his guide, might be employed in the same dangerous diplomacy. The idea at once pointed out a new course of operations to the Andalusian.

'Could I,' said he to himself, 'be lucky enough to capture this political intriguer, my fortune is made. The Cardinal remunerates service highly, and I shall have the double pleasure of filling my empty pockets, and revenging myself upon one who has so success-

fully marred my plans.'

The idea was at once adopted and acted on. The difficulty, of course, was to obtain any clue to the probable whereabouts of his old acquaintance. It was in vain that he perambulated at all hours the streets of Madrid, and with inquisitive eyes studied the appearance and bearing of any of its masquerading population, who in height or in manner reminded him of the contrabandista. His search was fruitless, for Clifford was at Segovia. At length, chance gave him the success which had been denied to his best efforts. The profligate young noble had expended his last peseta; and on the day of the second interview between Clifford and Therese at the Casa del Campo, he betook himself at an early hour to the same spot, in the hope that in some of its secluded alleys he might improve his exhausted finances by the robbery of some solitary lounger. There he had unexpectedly seen Clifford and Therese meet at the fountain. He had watched them; and his espial, as has been already mentioned, was remarked by José.

The prize he had so long desired was almost within his reach; yet how to seize it was the difficulty. If he gave information to the officials, he knew enough of his countrymen to be aware that the higher authorities would claim the merit and receive the reward.

To secure to himself the future bounty of the Cardinal, it was necessary that he should capture the prize alone. The subject required meditation.

\*Ca!' said he to himself, 'now that I have got upon foot of the game, it will be easy work for the future. It is evident that this fellow and the girl have a regular rendezvous at the fountain; and from day to day will I watch them until I have arranged my plans.'

Accordingly, on the following morning, and for three successive days, the Andalusian was on the spot, but in vain; for the interview of the lovers had been postponed until the thirtieth. On that day, too, came Don Ambrosio; but from repeated disappointment, hoping little, and consequently reckless of observation, he arrived at a later hour than usual. As before, he made his way to the fountain; and it was there, and while watched by Perez, that he saw pass the stout old woman in the rich drapery. The value of the jewellery caught his eye; his necessities were pressing, and he determined to sacrifice for the moment his love of revenge to his avarice. He followed her into the wood.

In the mean time, the dame had quitted the broader avenue, and entered one of the more retired alleys which crossed it at intervals. Into this, also, went Don Ambrosio, and seeing no one near, had immediately commenced an attack upon his portly companion. The partly assailed, however, aged though she was, made so vigorous a defence, that the Andalusian had nothing left for it but to drag her to a sapling near him; and to this he bound her by a cord which he chanced to have in his pocket. It was at this stage of the proceedings that Perez, who had dogged his enemy, made his appearance, and by his shouts released the old dame from the violence of her assailant, only to draw it upon himself. With what followed our readers are already acquainted. Neither the skill nor the knife of the Gitano availed him against the superior science and longer weapon of his opponent; and poor Perez added one more to the number of the victims which the house of Pimental had exacted from his race.

Clifford and Therese had, with tearful eyes, watched the last struggle, and now that it was over, they still continued to gaze in sorrow on all that remained to them of their humble friend, when they were recalled by a scream to the recollection that the violence of Don Ambrosio had yet another victim. The poor woman bound to the tree had, during the continuance of the mortal struggle, been silent from terror, but now that it was over, her fears returned, and she gave vent to them by repeated shrieks. Clifford at once proceeded to relieve her anxieties by unbinding her, and assuring her of safety. The old dame seemed much disposed to be grateful; for after expressing volubly her thanks in a language which seemed a strange mixture of broken Spanish and Italian, she concluded by flinging her arms round her protector's neck, and bestowing on him some dozen violent and repeated hugs.

'Oh! excellent young man!' said she, as soon as returning con-

fidence enabled her to give articulation to her words, 'how shall I thank you—how shall I repay you?' 'Neither, madame, is necessary,' said Clifford. 'That poor fellow,' continued he, referring to Perez, 'was my servant; and putting to death this ruffian, avenged

my own wrongs as well as yours.'

'And yet,' replied she, 'I am not the less grateful; and I would prove my gratitude. What is your name?' 'It matters not, madame,' said the young envoy, rather embarrassed by the request; 'nor do I sell my kind acts. But I must be gone, love,' said he, turning to Therese, and whispering in her ear, 'I must be gone, and that instantly. I see already some people approaching, and if I am detained to give evidence with regard to this brawl, farewell to my incognito, and all hope of saving the life of your grandfather. I will leave the park by the south gate, and as you return to the bridge of Segovia, José can inform the Gitano with the mules of the fate of his unfortunate comrade.'

He was about to move off as he spoke, when the old woman laid

a violent hand upon his arm.

'You are not going,' said she, 'you are not about to leave me here to be robbed and murdered! I am sure that ruffian has other companions in the wood. I am positive that I shall never be allowed to reach the bridge of Segovia alive.'

It was in vain that Clifford endeavoured to reassure her. Her terrors were too great to permit her to listen to any argument; and she continued to detain him with a grasp which he was unable

without positive violence to shake off.

In the mean time, the men whom Clifford had seen in the distance, rapidly approached. As they came nearer, their dark-green uniforms proclaimed them to be a portion of the soldiery employed in acting as the police of the royal parks, or what are called in France, gardes champétres. The alarm, too, appeared to have spread; for others in the same uniform appeared at the opposite end, and made escape impossible. Therese gave a scream, and even Clifford could no longer restrain his temper.

'Be satisfied, madame,' said he, in a bitter tone to his companion, who still continued to grasp his arm convulsively, as if existence depended upon the tenacity of her grip. 'Be satisfied with your day's work. I have saved your life, and you ruin me.' 'Ruin you!' repeated she, in tones of astonishment. 'I ruin you! Oh, excellent young man, you are mad!—I would make your fortune!'

'And you have done it thoroughly,' said Clifford, in a tone even more bitter than before. 'Do you see those men there in the

green uniform?'

'Yes, they are the Park guards. They are the soldiers of the

king and our friends.'

'Friends of yours they may be, but not friends of mine. They will commit me to a dungeon.' 'For this day's work?' said his companion, in a contemptuous tone. 'I will soon arrange that!'

' Not for this day's work, perhaps—but yet even that will serve

as well as a better cause; for if I am brought before the Audiencia, I am ruined—for I must tell my name—and I have an enemy.'

'Who is he?' said his new acquaintance, sharply. 'I will protect you against him.' 'I'shaw!' was the only reply vouchsafed by Clifford to what he deemed the extravagant assurance of his companion.

It did not seem, however, to disturb the good dame's equanimity, for, in a more commanding tone than before, she repeated:

'His name—young man, tell me his name.'

Clifford knew not what to do. The soldiers were approaching fast, and a few minutes were likely to seal his fate. As for poor Therese, she stood by, the picture of terror—clasping her hands, and the tears streaming down her cheeks. All at once, she seemed to have adopted a resolution, for she hurried up to her lover, and seizing the only disengaged arm, whispered:

'Oh, my dear Charles! trust her!—trust the good woman! I know she will not betray you!' 'Bravely spoken, girl!' said the elderly dame, whose quick ears had caught what was not intended for her. 'The good woman will not betray him—though if you had said the good lady, it would have been more respectful, and suited

better your place and mine.'

Therese would have apologised.

'Pooh, pooh, wench!' said her companion, bluntly. 'No offence. I am sometimes not over ceremonious myself. And now, young sir,' continued she, turning to Clifford, 'speak, or in another moment you may not have the opportunity!'

For an instant and no more, Clifford hesitated.

'Pshaw!' he said to himself, 'in half-an-hour all must out; and if Madame Curiosity here cannot aid, I do not well see she can injure me. I will even tell her!' And he bent down his head, and whispered in the ear of his new acquaintance: 'The Cardinal!'

The intelligence did not seem either to surprise or alarm his self-proclaimed ally, for she simply repeated in an interrogative tone:

'Alberoni?'

Clifford nodded.

'I guessed as much. And now,' muttered she, 'I will read a lesson to my other protegé. These handsome young men are always forgetting themselves!'

And with the words, she turned her back on the new-comers, and

drew her mantilla over her face.

In the mean time, the five or six soldiers first seen came up. They were headed by a remarkably good-looking officer of about twenty, who, as his eye caught sight of the two corpses, lost no time in displaying his claims to authority.

'Seize me that man and these two women!' said he, pointing to Clifford and his two companions. 'And cut me down that scoundrel by their side,' directing the attention of some of his satellites to José, who, with the instinct of his old vocation, had drawn his sword, and was preparing to do battle for his mistress. 'Cut him

down, I say! Pretty doings in the Royal Park indeed, when men

are murdered in open day!'

But the orders of the gallant lieutenant of gendarmerie were not destined to be obeyed; for as his subordinates were advancing to execute them, the old dame turned suddenly round, and threw back her mantilla. The Medusa's head would not have produced greater consternation; for as officers and men gazed at the face now displayed to them, there issued from their lips the unanimous exclamation of 'Donna Laura!' and all, as if by the common action of some internal machinery, sank upon their knees, and bent their heads to the earth.

A quiet smile stole across the features of the old woman as, with a side glance, she marked the astonishment of Clifford and his companion. She then, with a stately step, approached the prostrate leader of the detachment.

'You said right, Don Gregorio,' continued she, addressing the lad. 'Pretty doings in the Royal Park when men are murdered at mid-day, and where I myself, but for the aid of this gallant gentleman, might have been robbed, stripped, and assassinated. Was it for this that I pleaded your cause with a certain lady of our acquaintance, and had you made ranger of the Royal Park of the Casa del Campo? Ah! Briccone!'

And the dame took hold of the ear of the youthful officer, and

pinched it soundly.

Apparently the act had something in it of a consoling character, for the lad ventured to look up, and regarded his patroness with a pair of large, black, laughter-loving eyes, which, notwithstanding their affectedly imploring character, were full of fun and roguery. The lady replied to the glance by giving her protegé a smart blow on the head with her fan.

'Well,' said she, 'for once I will pardon the carelessness; but beware for the future—so you may kiss my hand. And now to business. As to this scoundrel,' continued the dame, pointing to Don Ambrosio, 'you will give the body to the public executioner. As to the other poor wretch, who died in my defence, he is a retainer of this caballero, and he will himself give orders as to what is to be done with him. And now, Don Gregorio, begone, and have these nasty dead bodies away with you: but let two of your men remain in the neighbourhood to take care of my safety, and await my return to my own apartments.'

The officer obeyed immediately the orders of his patroness. The rest of his soldiery had now arrived. Some of these took up the body of the Andalusian, while others, at the suggestion of Clifford, raised that of Perez, and under the superintendence of José, prepared to carry it to the gate, there to deliver it to the brother of his tribe. This done, as the crowd was beginning to increase, Clifford made another effort to withdraw. But once more his aged

companion arrested him.

'Not yet, senor,' said she; 'you do not go yet! You have done

Donna Laura Pescatori a service, and she is not ungrateful. You have an enemy—Alberoni. The miserable wretch! Many a time when he was but a gardener's boy, a ragged, ill-fed boy, have I given him a plate of soup to keep him from starving. Have no fear of him; for though the hound now arrays himself in silk and satins, and writes himself "Prince," my power is even still greater than his. I will do you service. Are you a soldier? If so, let that accursed rogue of a priest, prime minister, oppose it as he will, I can give you rank.'

Clifford shook his head.

'I must fry the fish, then, after another fashion. If you are poor, I can give you crowns, and in plenty.'

Again Clifford gave a sign of dissent.

'Use to, man, said his new patroness, 'what want you then?'
Clifford said nothing. In fact, for some time past, his busy mind had been ruminating upon the chances which Fortune had thrown in his way. Before leaving Paris, he had been made acquainted by Dubois and Lord Stanhope with the private history of the Spanish Court; and the two experienced diplomatists had not forgotten Donna Laura Pescatori, the Parmesan nurse of the queen, who now

Court; and the two experienced diplomatists had not forgotten Donna Laura Pescatori, the Parmesan nurse of the queen, who now held the post of Assa Feta, or first woman of the bedchamber, and whose power over her royal mistress was notoriously absolute.

Still no effort had been made to gain her favour, and no means devised of introducing their representative to her notice, as the ambassador of England and the prime minister of France had believed themselves certain of obtaining for Clifford an audience of Elizabeth Farnese through the Marquis Scotti. How the ambassador of Parma had refused to obey the orders of his master and fulfil the expectations of the English and French governments, is already known; and his desertion of their cause had hitherto proved one of the great obstacles to the success of the young soldier's mission.

The events of the last half-hour had, however, opened up chances of success hitherto undreamed of. The alliance of the nurse was quite as valuable, and was likely to prove more hearty than that of the ambassador, and through her means might be obtained that access to the queen which the marquis had refused to assist in pro-

curing him.

All this, which has taken some time to describe, had been rapidly passing through Clifford's mind, and he decided on availing himself of the aid of his new acquaintance; the more readily too, as the intense hatred of the nurse for the distinguished statesman, who had been the playmate of her childhood, was notorious. But, short as the delay had been in forming his resolution, it had exhausted the patience of the old lady, and she repeated her question in a sharper tone.

What want you, I say? You are young, you are bold, you are skilful with your weapon, you are handsome, and such have ever

wishes or ambitions. Speak, I will ensure their success.'

'Madame,' said Clifford, removing his hat, and bowing with great respect, 'you are right. I have wishes and ambitions, but I fear to mention them, because they are so extravagant, that even your power, great as it is, is not great enough to aid them.'

'You know me then?' 'I heard your name, madame, and that is sufficient; for who has heard of Donna Laura Pescatori, and

is ignorant of her power?

His new acquaintance seemed gratified by the answer.

'Per Bacco, boy,' said she, 'you speak prettily. You must needs make rare way with the petticoats. But, as to my power, you are right. I do possess it, and I would use it in your favour; so speak boldly.' 'Madame,' said Clifford, 'my wishes, as I informed you, are extravagant; and if I err in expressing them, I pray you to blame not my presumption, but your own kindness. I would have an audience of the queen!'

The Assa Feta started back in astonishment.

'Cospetto! child,' said she, 'you have the glance of a falcon that would fly a high flight, and your words do not belie your looks. But it is useless. The days of the Count of Melgar are past, and fair as your face is, the queen would not look at it.'

Poor Therese blushed deeply, and even her more unsophisticated

lover coloured to the temples.

'Pardon me, madame,'said he, 'you have accused me of a presumption which had never crossed my thought. I would but speak with her Majesty.'

'And upon what subject?' said his companion, testily. 'Cavaliers like you do not entertain royal ladies with the goodness of the last crop of olives, or the price of vermicelli a pound. Upon what

subject, I say?' Clifford was silent.

'Hark ye, young sir,' said Donna Laura. 'The queen was my nurseling, and many a time, when that vixen mother of hers drove her by ill-usage from the great drawing-room of the palace of Parnia, she would come to me and cry herself to sleep upon my lap. I was her only friend when she had no other, for no one but myself cared for the poor orphan; and now that she is a great dame, and has a hundred simpering courtiers, who look grave when she looks grave, and smile when she smiles, I sometimes suspect that I am her only friend still; and I will not admit any one to her presence unless I be assured that the object of the interview is to be nefit her and her children. Why then, I ask, do you seek an audience of the queen?'

Clifford stood undecided, and over his ingenuous brow thought after thought chased each other rapidly. The watchful eyes of Therese marked them as they passed, and understood them well.

'Yes, my dear Charles,' said she, 'you must trust Donna Laura. Why should you not trust one who owes you so much? Nay,' continued she, as her lover still hesitated, 'I can guess the reason of your doubts. You fear to risk the life of my grandfather on the chance. It is natural. The responsibility should be mine, and I will

not shrink from it. Donna Laura, continued she, turning to her, 'I will tell you everything. I am Donna Teresa Pacheco, the grandchild of the Duke of Escalona. The Cardinal has sent him to Segovia, and intends in a few days to try him for his life, out of revenge for my grandfather having struck him in the king's presence; and so my-' and Theresa paused and coloured, and after an instant's hesitation continued, 'and so this gentleman would seek an interview with the queen, to induce her to use her influence

with Don Philip to dismiss the Prime Minister.'

'Ha!' said the Assa Feta, turning towards her companion with eager interest. 'So you are the child of the old grandee who thrashed this gardener's boy, whom they have put into scarlet stockings? By my word, I honour you, wench, for your ancestry! And you, Sir,' continued she, turning to Clifford, 'would ask the queen to turn the fellow out? Good luck to your efforts, say I. But I doubt their success. Her Majesty is a mother, and as the children of the Savoyarde, her predecessor, take crown, kingdom, everything, it is natural—and I do not blame her—that she should wish to get an establishment for Don Carlos and her other little ones. Now between ourselves—it is this that gives the power to the Cardinal. He has promised to obtain such an establishment, and however much I may dislike the man, I must say that my mistress's interest will compel her to support him.'

'And if,' said Clifford, 'such an establishment could be secured

to her family by other means, would she still support him?"

'Not a day—not an hour—I would not permit it. I tolerate this scoundrel only for the sake of the giovinetti.'

'Then, Donna Laura,' continued Clifford, 'it is possible that I

may have the power to assure her of such,' and he smiled.

The boast, if such it was, was evidently listened to with incredulity, for it was in a tone of contemptuous disbelief that Donna Laura exclaimed: 'Vaya! you! a private person!' 'I am not a private person.'

'I am not a Castilian?'

'I am not a Castilian.'

'But a subject of Don Philip?' 'I am not a subject of Don Philip.

'Diavolo! He is mysterious—the youngster. What are you then?'

'A foreigner, and sent by foreigners to the Queen.'

'Per Bacco! But they might have given you a more sure means of access to Her Majesty than the chance rescue of an Assa Feta in a royal park. Who was to have introduced you?"

'The Marquis Scotti.' 'And he has failed you?'

Clifford nodded.

'Ah! the old rogue! I should have guessed as much. Well, I shall be the trustier ally. You pledge me your word, da galantuomo, that you come on this business?' Člittord bowed.

Donna Laura welcomed the assent with a nod; but suddenly a new thought seemed to cross her mind, and her features assumed

the character of irritation.

'I doubt you not,' said she at length; 'but the queen is suspicious, and if I ask her to see you on no better grounds than what you have told me, she will believe that I am narrating a tale out of a story-book. If it be true that you are sent to her, you must have some distinct message.'

'I have. I hold a letter to her from his Highness her uncle,

which I am instructed to deliver privately and in person.'

'From the Duke of Parma?' Clifford nodded.

'Busta! busta! That's enough. Then I will do your bidding. To-morrow there is at ten o'clock a sitting of the Council of Castile, and it will occupy the king till mid-day. Do you see,' continued she, as she led the way towards the open ground on the side of the river, and pointed to the palace opposite. 'Do you see that old bastion wall there, that runs all the way from the round Moorish tower as far as the open space in front of the palace?'

Clifford gave a sign of assent.

'Well,' continued his monitress, 'at the end of it, near the corner of the wall of the barracks of the Spanish guard, is a wicket. Be there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and you will find it open. Pass through it and follow the footpath till you reach the door of the Moorish tower. On the right-hand side is an iron bell-handle; pull it gently, and I will be there to conduct you to the queen; and remember, if you have a court-suit wear it, for Elizabeth Farnese is jealous of respect.'

Clifford was profuse in his thanks.

'Not a word, boy,' said the Assa Feta. 'I do what I ought for my mistress' interest as well as yours. And you, my child,' continued she, turning to Therese, 'have you no favour to ask of me?'

The girl timidly replied that she had no claim upon her kindness. Yes, you have. You twice told that unbelieving fellow to trust me. So out with your request, for you have taken me in a lucky

moment, and I cannot choose but grant it.'

' My grandfather's life,' faintly articulated her companion.

'Bah! that of course. I love the old grandee for having thrashed the mitred scullion of Vendôme; though, on second thoughts, it may be as well to say nothing at present on the subject to the queen, for your mother, if I recollect, was a relation of the Ursins, and Elizabeth Farnese loves not the princess or her kindred. But is there no one else in the world in whom you take any interest?' and she looked maliciously towards Clifford.

Therese blushed crimson.

'Ah! I see, it is as I expected,' continued her companion. 'Well, you need not colour so, child; it is very natural. I always myself had a soft heart for a handsome young man, and that lover of yours is very handsome! 'I he rogue, too, has such a wheedling tongue of his own. I am not sure that even now I would venture to trust myself with him. Ah! you laugh, *Briccone*,' continued she, turning towards Clifford, 'and you think me sixty, no doubt; it's a mistake, I am only fifty-five. But even if I were sixty, every woman likes a

lover as long as she has eyes to see and ears to listen to him. But now be off with you, and by the south gate. For this matter I see has been buzzed abroad, and there are more people coming from the bridge of Segovia than you need to meet with. It shall be my care

that Donna Teresa reaches home in safety.'

With these words the old dame took Therese's arm within hers, and moved towards the great entrance of the Casa del Campo, followed by the two guards, who had been left as her escort. For an instant Clifford stood still to watch the retreating form of his ladylove, and to receive the adieu which the glance of her eloquent eyes threw back to him over her shoulder. He then, too, left the spot which had been the scene of so many important events, and made his way through a side gate, which led from the park to the southward. On gaining the open country he turned to the left. Half-anhour's walking brought him to the Toledo road, and by it he reached in safety his quarters in the Calle de la Cabeza.

# CHAPTER XL.

#### THE QUEEN AND HER NURSE.

WE must for a moment leave our hero to the solitude of his apartments, and follow the portly dame, whom he had saved from the

harpy hands of Don Ambrosio.

Donna Laura Pescatori, the Assa Feta of the queen, had been nurse to Elizabeth Farnese. The wife of a Parmesan peasant, and herself one of the lowest classes, and exhibiting in her voice, manner, and language, hourly proofs of her origin, she nevertheless concealed under a coarse exterior no small portion of tact and shrewdness. These qualities, together with a sincere attachment to her nurseling, had transferred her from the rude hut which had been her original residence, to the scarcely more sumptuous apartments of the infant princess. Such as they were, however, they formed to the child a city of refuge, in which she sought an asylum from the ill-usage of her mother, and the neglect of the ducal domestics. The storms without only served to make her prize more fondly the eager, loving face that awaited to welcome her within, and her nurse became her almost only companion—the ever-sympathising confidant of her loves and her hates, her hopes, her wishes, her fears.

Under such circumstances, it is easy to understand that the influence of Laura Pescatori over her charge became paramount; and when the intrigues of Alberoni placed upon the head of Elizabeth Farnese one of the mightiest crowns in Europe, it was natural that the dependent, who had shared her adversity, should be invited to partake of her brighter fortunes. Her nurse followed her to Spain; but no longer the insignificant person which she had been in the palace of Parma. She tacked Donna to her name, arrayed herself in silks and velvets, made no secret of her influence over her mistress, and was courted, caressed, and feared. Still the new exterior

grandeur changed in no respect the inward woman. She was coarse, vulgar, and overbearing as ever, and expressed herself with regard to all around her, king and grandee not excepted, in epithets, expletives, adjectives, and interjections of so Doric a character, as to throw even the courtiers of a lax age into a state of blushing and tribulation.

The queen herself offered no opposition to the sayings or doings of her attendant. It is astonishing how fixed and long-lived are the habits and feelings of infancy. The awe inspired in the boy survives in the man; and we doubt if the fiercest warrior that ever lived is not, in the height of his glory, to a certain extent, controlled by the appearance of his old pedagogue. And so it was with Elizabeth Farnese. She had never got over the obedience which had marked her early childhood, and her imperious spirit bent before one more imperious still.

It might be, too, that affection lent its aid to rivet the bond. The Queen of Spain was detested by her subjects, and returned their hate with interest. But every human heart must have some object to love; and the Italian princess, in the palace of Madrid as in the palace of Parma, was glad to retire from the flattery of scheming ladies of the bedchamber and deceitful courtiers to the society of one who, however coarse her habits and nature, was at least honestly attached to her. Thus Donna Laura was to the queen what La Roche was to her husband; and if Marly and Versailles, and recollections of France formed the staple of the one tête-à-tete, the other was as lavishly imbued with the associations of infancy, and a longing for return to the country and the people from which both had

It was about two hours after the scene of the adventure of the Casa del Campo. At the further end of that gallery of the palace with which the reader is already acquainted, and through which Therese had passed to her interview with Philip, was a room of no great size, and plainly furnished. Its only occupant was a lady of about six-and-twenty. She was tall, slender, and well-made, and would have been considered handsome, but that the face was marked with small-pox. Still the features had lost little of the original grace of their outline; and the lofty forehead and intelligent eve, while they in no degree detracted from the feminine character of the countenance, gave evidence of a mind and energy which commanded the respect of the spectator. Young as she was, she had her hair powdered, and twisted upon either temple into a single curl, while behind it fell on her neck in two long ringlets, each terminated by a knot of blue ribbons. In other respects her dress was little remark. able. It was of dark silk, edged round the neck with lace, displaying, according to the fashion of the time, much of the bust, and fastened in front by a brooch set in diamonds.

The expression of Elizabeth Farnese, for the solitary eccupant of the plainly-furnished apartment was the Queen of Spain and the Indies, was haggard and careworn, and she paced backwards and forwards within the narrow boundaries of her room, much with the

air of a lioness in a cage.

Her meditations, of whatever character they were, were interrupted by a hurried rap at the door; and Donna Laura, without awaiting the permission of her mistress, entered. The Assa Feta was still under the excitement of the morning's adventures, and with the volubility of her sex and country, she proceeded to give vent to her feelings.

'Ah, mia cara, mia cara!' said she, clasping her hands with all the

energy of an Italian, 'what an adventure! what a calamity!'

The queen paused in her hurried walk, and then, in a tone of bitterness not unmixed with sarcasm, she said, 'What you, Laura? and, as usual, the harbinger of some evil fortune. To whom has it

happened?' 'To me, carissima.'

I guessed as much; ever more grumbling! I have sometimes thought, that it might teach you a valuable lesson were I to give you a better cause for it. If the Assa Feta of the Queen of Spain were compelled for a month to share as of old her chestnuts and her maize with the pigs which she was feeding for the market, she might be the better able to appreciate properly her present prosperity. What has happened,' continued the queen, in a mocking tone, 'to Donna Laura Pescatori? Has she, as usual, lost her kerchief or her shoebuckle?' 'No, no, cara—a real calamity!'

'What, something more dreadful?' continued her royal mistress, in the same tone of sarcasm; 'some of my liege subjects, I suppose, have forgotten to doff their beavers to so important a personage as

the first woman of my bedchamber.'

'Per Bacco!' said her irritable attendant; 'if the Assa Feta of your Majesty had met with such a want of respect, it is your

Majesty, and not I, that should have resented it.'

And why, pray?' said Elizabeth Farnese, with the most provoking coolness. 'Cospetto! the thing is clear enough. Laura Pescatori might walk the streets of Madrid by the year, and were she merely Laura Pescatori, no one would take the trouble either to ban or bless her; but when the Manolas shout as I pass, "There goes the nurse of the Parmesan! There goes the she-wolf that suckled the Farnese! May the Virgin curse her and her brood!" it is your Majesty, and not your poor servant, that is dishonoured by the scandal.'

'You are right, Laura,' said the queen, in accents of deep melancholy, 'it is I, and not you, that am dishonoured by the scandal. They love me not, these Spaniards. Even my presence cannot impose upon them respect. I never go beyond the gates of the palace but they insult my ears with the praises of my predecessor—"Long live the Savoyarde!" is ever the cry. Well, I sometimes have wished that the Savoyarde lived still. Better that it should have been so than that her successor should have gained her throne only to see her children sacrificed for those of another woman. Yes,' continued she, 'yes, they love me not, and I—I hate, detest, loathe them.

Strange,' continued she, turning to her nurse, 'that in all this wide kingdom, I—its sovereign—should have but two friends, you and Alberoni.'

'If you treat not the scullion of Vendôme,' said the old woman, pettishly, 'better than you do me, it can scarce be said that you

spoil those friends of yours by affection.'

'What, in anger, Laura?' said Elizabeth Farnese, with a gay laugh, whose clear, ringing notes, and the genial smile which accompanied it, marked her extraordinary versatility of temperament and feature. 'Come, let us shake hands, and forgive.'

She extended her fair fingers as she spoke, but her advances met no reply: on the contrary, the old woman plumped her portly person down upon an arm-chair, and composing face and limbs into the most perfect rigidity, sat the personification of sullen petulance.

The queen seemed accustomed to the mood, for, with a smile, she took her place behind her attendant's chair, and stooping over her shoulder, made several unsuccessful attempts to kiss the cheeks that

were sedulously turned away from her.

'Madre mia,' said she, in a coaxing tone, 'would you be angry with your child? Fie, fie, my dear Laura, my good Laura! you will not be so silly. Come now, I was wrong—I confess I was wrong, and I will do penitence for my fault; for you shall tell me your story, the whole story from beginning to end, and I will listen to it without a yawn, or a pout, or an exclamation—come, now. Will

you not tell me the story?'

With the words, Elizabeth Farnese moved to the front of the chair, and sitting down on the knees of her attendant, passed her arm round her neck, and fixed her beautiful eyes upon her face with a glance of the strongest affection. The Assa Feta made two or three slight attempts to dislodge her, and some half-dozen times the eyebrow was lowered, and the mouth repeated its pantomimic expression of sullen humour. It was in vain; Elizabeth Farnese retained her place, and the bright, laughing eyes gazed more affectionately than ever. All at once the ice thawed. The old woman clasped her nurseling convulsively in her arms, kissed her a thousand times on cheek, and forchead, and lip, exclaiming at intervals, "Anima mia! you know I love you. How can you thus torture your old nurse?"

Well, well, I was wrong, said the queen, 'but you must, as I said, forget and forgive; and so, now tell me your story.' And she rose, and drawing a chair to the side of Donna Laura, seated herself, clasping her hands gravely, and affecting with playful mockery to give to her features and manner the character of deep attention.

'Well, carissima,' said her attendant, unable or unwilling to see anything in her mistress's mood but a decorous anxiety to listen to an important communication; 'you must know that I was in the Casa del Campo to-day, taking my walk as usual, when a ruffian attacked me, and I should have been robbed and murdered, had it not been for an angel in the shape of a handsome young man.'

'Ah! Laura, Laura,' said the queen, shaking her head, 'the old story! you are as susceptible as a girl of fifteen; you are always meeting with angels in the shape of handsome young men. If there were robbers in the royal park, what was your other angelic juvenile about? for, if I recollect aright, you persuaded me to make lieutenant of the forest guard there a certain Don Gregorio, who was also, to believe you, an Adonis.'

'Ah, he came to my rescue too, though, I confess, somewhat late; but the rogue looked contrite, and I shall give him a lecture on his carelessness in private. But the young man who freed me from the

robber really was an angel.'

'No doubt of it,' said the queen, laughing; 'and I suppose he is intended to be ranger of some other of the royal parks; for I take it for granted you are about to ask my good offices for him.'

'Cospetto, mia cara, you are right. But I doubt if a rangership

would suit him. He wants something else.'

'A favour, Laura?—a favour, of course. Well, I guessed as much. What is it?'

The Assa Feta appeared embarrassed, and made no answer. The

queen marked her hesitation, and interpreted it justly.

'I fear,' said Elizabeth Farnese, gaily, 'the robbery is like to cost me dear; but the debt must be paid. What is this angelic youth's

request?' 'An audience of your Majesty.'

Laura! said the queen, as she sprang to her feet, 'are you mad? Do you know the risk and danger of Philip's jealousy? It is impossible. 'Not impossible, cara,' said the nurse, in an apologetic tone.

'Yes, Laura, impossible! You know how much my credit with the king has been shaken by my supporting Alberoni in the late unfortunate war in which he involved us. Upon retaining that credit depends the future establishment of my children. I will not peril their interests for the whim of a stranger.'

'Nor will I, carissima.'

'Then why ask me to grant the audience?' Because I believe that it may benefit the little ones. Do not I love the giovinetto Don Carlos as if he were my own? and would not I sacrifice life to see him a crowned king?'

'I believe you, my dear, good Laura; I believe you. But what

has all this to do with the stranger, or this interview?

'Answer me first, this, cara. Why do you support Alberoni?'

'Laura, you know as well as I do: because he promised to obtain for my child the investiture of Parma and Placentia. Does not the whole happiness of my children and of myself depend upon its attainment? It kills me, I tell you, to think that the son of the Savoyarde will have an empire, and mine not even a petty province. And then myself; if Philip should die, what would be my position here? Why, already the Prince of the Asturias treats me with the most marked disrespect; and, were he king to-morrow, would probably send me to a nunnery to sleep away the best days of my

existence in a distant province, amid a parcel of half-idiot women. No, no,' said she, as she rose, and began pacing backwards and forwards in the apartment, 'I must have that investiture, come what may.'

'For five years, carissima, you have been attempting to gain it,

and have failed.'

'Alas!' said the queen, wringing her hands, 'it is but too true.'

'Yet you have employed for the purpose the powers of a great kingdom—troops, fleets, money.'

'True again; but why madden me by repeating this?'

'Because my mother-wit tells me that the troops, the ships, the money, were enough, if they had been well directed, to have gained you what you want, and more. If they have failed, it must have been from the blundering of the man that guided them.'

'Laura, Laura! your hatred to your old gossip makes you unjust.'
'Not a whit; I but repeat what everybody says, and everybody knows. But if I detest the fellow—it may be a little too bitterly—you go as far wrong on the other side, for you worship him.'

It is false! I only employ him because I conceive him to be the

best agent for obtaining independence for Don Carlos.'

'And if,' said the Assa Feta, in a meaning tone, 'you found that he was a bar to obtaining that independence, would you still keep him in his post?'

'Why do you ask?' 'For a reason I have.'

The queen mused for some time. 'My first duty,' said she, at length, 'is to secure the interest of my child; and if I found Alberoni in the way of his advancement, I should no longer retain him in office. Nor could be justly complain, for if he did me once a

great service he has been amply repaid.

'And that's God's truth,' said the old woman, in a violent tone. 'He has been well repaid. You brought with you two dependents from Parma, him and myself. You made me Assa Feta. I do not complain. It was enough, and I am content. But what have you made him—a gardener's boy, a scullion of Vendôme, the son of poor Piero Alberoni, my next neighbour as used to be, the mighty lord of a possessione, consisting of half an acre of olive-ground—why, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, grandee, with a yearly pension of twenty thousand ducats from the Order of Alcantara, and fifty thousand from his bishopric of Malaga, and a hundred and twenty thousand from his archbishopric of Seville; and he the ugly, squat, short-necked scoundrel, to give himself airs forsooth, and affect not to see me, his old playmate and gossip, who am as good as himself, and was better than himself. I could tear the wretch's eyes out.' And the Assa Feta, in the violence of her indignation, started from her seat and like her mistress paced the room rapidly.

The anger of her dependent, however well founded it might appear to herself, seemed to strike the queen as ridiculous, for she

burst out laughing.

'Your dislike, my dear Laura,' said she, 'to your old acquaint-

ance ever discomposes your philosophy; but whence this new outburst of passion against him? or where in all that you have said, supposing it were true, am I to look for a reason for granting an audience to your new protegé; for he, at least, can have nothing to do either with me or the Cardinal.'

'Wrong, carissima; he has much to do with both. The proud

priest locked up the lad in a dungeon.'

'Unpleasant enough, but what have I to do with that?' 'Only that you were the cause of his being sent there.'

'Come, come, Laura! that is a little too much: I will undertake

to say that I never saw him, or heard his name.'

' Possible enough, for he has just come to Madrid the bearer of a letter from the Duke of Parma to your Majesty.'
'From my uncle?' The Assa Feta nodded.

'And why, said Elizabeth, her eyes flashing fire, 'have I not had it ere this?' 'Because the lad's orders were to deliver it privately and in person.'

'What could have induced the Duke to send me a special messenger?' 'That's clear enough, important business; not a

doubt of it.'

'But there can be none such between him and me, except the settlement of the duchies?' 'I guessed as much, carissima, that's

precisely the conclusion I came to.

'But why this mystery? Why not forward the missive through the regular channel of Scotti, his ambassador?" 'The bloated old rogue of a marguis has the reputation of pocketing freely the Cardinal's ducats; and his Highness probably feared that if Scotti had the fingering of the outside of the despatch, his brother rogue, the priest, would have had the reading of its contents.'

The queen mused for some time.

'If Alberoni,' muttered she to herself, 'be so anxious to prevent

its delivery, it must be adverse to his interests.'

'I guessed that too, carissima,' said the old nurse, with a chuckle; 'that's precisely the conclusion that I came to, or I should not have asked an audience for my friend of the Casa del Campo. But I trusted him at once, as soon as I found that he hated the Cardinal

as the devil hates holy water.

'But how is all this to be effected without the risk of discovery and ruin? When and where can I see him? 'Easily enough. The Council of Castile sits to-morrow at ten. The king must preside, and for two hours you will be free. I will bring the young man by the staircase of the Moorish tower, which opens into my apartments, and from thence hither.'

The queen paused, as if in doubt.

'There is no danger, carissima,' said her nurse, 'and the interests of the giovinetto are at stake.'

The last remark seemed to decide Elizabeth Farnese. 'Well.

be it so,' said she; 'I will see him at ten.'

'And if he grant Parma and Placentia on condition of the dismissal

of that red-stocking priest, the fellow goes?" 'He does, or at

least he shall, if the king will be persuaded by me.'

'Oh, the brute! oh, the beast!' said the old woman, clenching her fist, and with eyes which sparkled with fierce passion. 'A pretty king, indeed. If he refuse you I could find it in my heart to strangle him ere he were a day older. But he can never,' continued she, as with true Italian versatility her features relapsed into a smile, 'he can never resist those beautiful eyes of yours. No, carissima, Alberoni must go; and when I see the fellow stripped of his gay plumage I shall once more breathe freely; for that man's pride and ingratitude, after all the cheese-soup I have given him, have for the last five years kept me well-nigh choking.'

And the queen and her attendant parted.

# CHAPTER XLI.

# PARMA AND PLACENTIA.

At a quarter before ten o'clock on the following morning, Clifford started for the postern, although it was with some degree of fear that he contemplated approaching it. He was well aware of the keen eyes of Alberoni and his satellites, and nothing but the great prize at stake would have induced him to venture into the neighbourhood of the residence of his quick-witted enemy, and that at the most busy period of the day. To diminish, however, the risk as much as possible, instead of taking the shortest route by the square in front of the main entrance of the palace, he made his way through the Haymarket, and thence to the steep descent of the ground which led from the city to the bridge of Segovia. The further side of this was bounded by a stone wall. It was the fence of the palace gardens, and terminated at one end in the river, and at the other connected itself with the ancient bastion at whose extremity was the portal designated by Donna Laura.

As soon as Clifford reached the stone fence he took out his flint and steel, lighted a paper cigar, and, with the air of one who was doing his best to lounge away the tedious hours, followed the line of the wall towards the postern. On reaching it, he turned lazily round and took a survey of his neighbourhood. No one was near him. He pushed the door; it gave way to his pressure. He entered, and closed it after him. On the inside was a pathway which led to the foot of an old round tower, and along this Clifford moved rapidly. At the end of it he found, as the nurse had forewarned him on the preceding day, a narrow, massive gate, with an iron bell-handle in the stone-work by its side. Clifford rang gently; the portal was immediately opened by the Assa Feta in person. She beckoned him in, carefully re-bolted the door, and hurried up the spiral staircase that led from it, followed by her companion. On reaching the top she turned to the right, along a narrow corridor, and entered a room at its farther end. The door of this also she bolted, and then for the first time addressed her protegé.

'You are punctual, my friend,' said she. 'But I suppose,' she continued, with a smile, 'that at your age, when a lady is in the case, punctuality is no uncommon virtue. And now off with your cloak, and let us see if you have obeyed my instructions, for the queen is but a woman after all, and every woman likes to see a young man well-dressed, even though she does not intend him to make love to her.'

With the words she pulled from Clifford's shoulders the large blue mantle which formed then, as now, the nearly universal upper gar-

ment of the middle classes in the Peninsula.

'Bravo!' continued she, as the young envoy stood before her in the rich court-dress of the period. 'Nothing could be better. The coat of black velvet—true Genoa as I live!—and the ruffles and cravat of the richest Mechlin, and the broad sword-belt and the steel-handled rapier. Ah, you rogue, how handsome you are! Had I been ten years younger, I am not sure that I could have defended my heart. But I am an old woman now, old enough to be your mother, and I have given up all these follies.'

And the dame, as if to prove her words, took hold of Clifford's chin with her forefinger and thumb, and imprinted upon his lips a salute which, nevertheless, had in it very little of maternity.

'And now,' continued she, 'I will go and see if my mistress is ready. She knows of my obligations to you, and is not unwilling

to repay them.'

Donna Laura left the room as she spoke, and returning almost immediately beckoned to the young envoy to follow her. Clifford obeyed, and, after passing through two or three low-ceiled, gloomy-looking apartments, was introduced to the presence of Elizabeth Farnese.

The queen looked pale and careworn. To say the truth, she had passed a sleepless night. The leading feature in her character was maternal affection, or perhaps, to use a more accurate phrase, a passion for the aggrandisement of her children. To this had been directed all her energies. For this she had made Alberoni prime minister, and for this also she had supported him in the long war which had been terminated only three months before by an uncertain truce, and which, though it was waged professedly for the honour of Spain, had, in fact, no other end than the attainment of a kingdom for Don Carlos. In the early part of the struggle, the ambition of Elizabeth Farnese had pointed successively at Naples and Sardinia, and Sicily; but as its results became less and less auspicious, she grew more moderate in her demands, and at length would have gladly compromised her claims to greater empire, for the recognition of her son as the heir of Parma and Placentia.

Upon the part of the old duke there was no difficulty. He was warmly attached to his niece and her children, but unhappily his personal predilections were of little avail. Great nations bestow themselves. Smaller principalities, whatever be the desires of the people or the prince, are ever the gift of the mightier dynasties in

their neighbourhood, whose interests are likely to be affected by the personal character or connections of the future ruler. Of all this the queen was well aware, and it was therefore with a throbbing heart that she saw the unknown envoy, the bearer of the missive from her relative, enter the room.

Clifford bent one knee to the ground as the formal ceremonial of the period required. When he arose, Donna Laura had vanished,

and he found himself alone with his royal hostess.

'Senor,' said the queen in a low voice, whose well-modulated tones fell gracefully on the ear, 'I have been informed by my nurse that she is indebted to you for safety and for life. She has been my attendant since infancy, and I hold a kindness done to her as one done to myself. In her name, therefore, and in my own, I thank you.'

Clifford bowed.

'I would do more,' continued the queen. 'My influence in this kingdom of Spain is not so great,' continued she, with a smile. 'as people would allege, and yet, small as it is, it is still great enough to benefit those who serve well me or my friends. In what can I aid you?' 'Madam,' said Clifford, 'I return my grateful thanks to your Majesty, but I have nothing to ask save what you have already granted, the honour of the present interview.'

'And yet that interview,' said Elizabeth, with a smile, 'must have had its object.' 'It had. His Serene Highness the Duke of Parma has addressed this letter to your Majesty, and I have the

honour to be its bearer.'

And Clifford, as he spoke, drew a packet from his bosom, and

again sinking on his knee, presented it to the queen.

Elizabeth carefully studied the superscription and the seal, as if a momentary doubt had come over her; but as she gazed, her brow cleared again, and she tore the billet open and read as follows:

'Private and confidential.

'My dear Niece,

'We are fallen on evil times, and to me the unhappy issue of the last war threatens the most serious results. The emperor not only refuses to acknowledge my power to transmit the duchies by will, but hints a doubt of my present right to possess them. For me unaided to make opposition to the house of Austria would be madness. In France and England alone rests my hope for the present, and yours for the future. They have undertaken to forward vou this by a trusty messenger, and with him you may safely confer upon all matters touching our common interest.

'Your affectionate uncle, 'Francis.

The queen's cheek paled as she read, and she directed an anxious glance to her companion.

'Senor,' said she at length, 'my uncle writes me on family affairs. If it were not against the rules of diplomacy,' continued she, with a

forced smile, 'I would ask if you could guess at the tenor of this letter?' 'Madam,' said Clifford, 'I know its words. The duke sent a copy of it to Paris, to the ambassador of England, and to the Cardinal Dubois, and by them it was communicated to me.'

'Indeed!' said Elizabeth. 'They know, then, the unjustifiable

intentions of their ally. What do they say to them?

Clifford was silent.

'What, senor,' continued his companion, in an excited tone, 'has honour, then, left the earth? I should have hoped that the representatives of two great nations would have had too much generosity to have tolerated such a gross act of spoliation.' Madam,' replied Clifford, 'will you permit me to say that the representatives of great nations are but trustees for the interests of others, and the duty of a trustee requires not generosity, but justice?'

'And do you call this justice? Is it just that the Duke of Parma should have his states forcibly taken from him?' 'There may be injustice in the emperor towards the duke, but to ourselves, at

least, there is justice in not interfering with his plans.'

'Ha! sir diplomatist, how prove you that?' 'Because, madam, to oppose them effectually would require troops, and money, and men; and how could we answer to our sovereigns for having expended their resources on what concerns them not?'

'But still good feeling might suggest such an act.' 'Madam,' said Clifford, with a smile, 'will you permit me to observe that for the last five years Spain has endeavoured to deprive his Majesty George the First of his kingdom, and the Duke of Orleans of his

regency?'

'And rightly,' retorted his companion, with a flashing eye: 'for the house of Stuart has a better claim to Great Britain than the Elector of Hanover, and my husband to the regency of France than the Duke of Orleans.' 'Madam, I will not argue the question. I would merely venture to suggest that my master and his Royal Highness the Duke may possibly entertain a different opinion; but whether they do so or not, it would, will you permit me to say, be asking too much of human nature, to suppose that they would willingly incur expense for the benefit of a country which, rightfully or wrongfully, has been their untiring enemy.'

'You speak of Spain, Sir diplomatist, but you forget that the injury at present is not done to Spain but to Parma.' 'Madam, forgive me for saying that Parma is Spain. The relationship of the duke to your Majesty, and his tried fidelity to your house, cause him to be considered as a dependent, and his states as a dependency.'

'Well, sir, have it as you will. I will no longer argue the matter, either upon the basis of justice or generosity. It is clear that on the present occasion any hope of attention to either would be misplaced. I will argue it simply as a matter of interest. The influence of France and England depends upon the maintenance of the balance of power. If Austria obtain Parma and Placentia, the emperor would become too strong for his allies, for he would be paramount

in Italy.' 'The danger is great, madam, but it is, at least, distant. If Parma and Placentia remain with the duke, there is a still greater danger for the allies—there is a present one.'

In what?' 'Because the duchies remain, in fact, a part of the

Spanish monarchy, and secure its supremacy in northern Italy.'

'And where is the present danger? There is now peace between us.' 'For three months, madam, there has been. Who can tell if it will exist for three months longer?'

'What should prevent it?' 'Forgive me for saying so, but a cause sufficiently notorious—the restless ambition of the Cardinal.' 'Of Alberoni?' 'Of Alberoni.'

'Of Alberoni?' 'This is too insolent, senor,' said the queen, rising from her seat. 'Your masters in Paris know the minister is a Parmesan like myself, and they would insult me through him. Confess now. Is not the whole of this spoliation scheme of the emperor got up for the purpose of blotting out the house of the Farnese? For years has Spain defied your united power, for its councils, whatever might be the apparent agent, were really directed by a woman. You knew this, and when you learned the intention of my uncle to leave the investiture of his duchies to my child, you determined to revenge yourselves for your baffled policy on me by depriving my children of their birthright. It was well done-it was nobly done: worthy of those who say honestly that they do not affect generosity, and who might have added that they have an equal contempt for justice; and the queen once more flung herself into her chair, and regarded the young envoy with an expression of unutterable scorn.

Clifford was embarrassed, and for a while there was a dead silence.

It was broken by the queen.

'Well, sir,' said she, 'why do you stay here? Why do you not go? I take it for granted you have performed the honourable mission with which you were entrusted. You came to tell me that the allies had decided that my children should be plundered. You have performed your task; now begone.'

Clifford did not move. His delay seemed to irritate his com-

panion; for again she repeated, in an excited voice:

'Begone, sir, I say. You know nothing of diplomacy. Will you force me to add that you are equally ignorant of politeness?'

Clifford for the moment looked as if uncertain how to act. He

then sank upon one knee.

I obey you, madam,' said he, in a low tone. 'And yet, will you permit me to say before I leave the room, that on one point you have misunderstood me?'

'Ha! I guessed as much,' retorted his companion, her eyes flashing fire, 'I cannot comprehend the use of common words. I am a dolt, a fool, an idiot.' 'Madam, the fault was mine; I must have expressed myself unhappily. What I said, or what I meant to say, was, that there is no wish on the part of my masters to deprive the princes of your family of their inheritance.'

'What, sir! would you deny your words? Did you not tell me

that the emperor was about to take possession of the duchies, and that England and France would not interfere?' 'Madam, I said that England and France had no interest to interfere, so long as the intentions of Spain were understood to be hostile to my master and the regent.'

'And I informed you, sir, that they were not hostile.' 'And I, madam, took the liberty to reply that so long as the Cardinal was the minister of your Majesty, it would be impossible to disabuse

my masters of their belief in the danger of hostilities.'

The queen was silent for a minute.

'Do I understand aright,' continued she, at length, 'that there is no opposition on the part of France and England to my uncle's granting the investiture of the duchies to my son?' 'None whatever, madam, provided——'

'Provided what?' 'They saw at the head of your Majesty's

government a native-born Spaniard.'

'Provided, in short, the Cardinal were removed.' 'They fear, madam, his restless ambition, and his Italian associations.'

'I repeat my question, sir; provided the Cardinal were removed?'

Clifford bowed.

The queen paused a minute, as if in thought.

'And supposing,' continued she at length, 'he were removed. In what do I benefit by this?' 'You have, madam, the good wishes of the allies.'

'I have no belief in faith without works. The emperor remains as formidable as ever. He will still retain the will to deprive my uncle of his duchy. Will he still be permitted the power?' 'No, madam. My masters ask of you to dismiss the Cardinal. If you grant their request, you will pacify Europe. The boon is a great one, and their gratitude will be proportionate.'

'They will ensure,' said the queen, eagerly, 'the investiture of Parma and Placentia to Don Carlos?' 'Madam, they will do more

-they will add Tuscany.'

'Ha!' said Elizabeth, starting to her feet; 'that would be a principality worth having! And they guarantee this? They will guarantee it, you say?' 'Provided, madam,' replied Clifford, resting strong emphasis on the word, 'Alberoni be dismissed from his post,

and from the kingdom.'

'Ah! true—true, I had forgotten; and that same dismissal may be no easy matter.' And with the air of one over whose sunshine of happiness had come a sudden cloud, she once more sank down in her chair, and was silent. Suddenly she started. 'You will excuse me, senor,' said she, 'we talk of matters on which depend the fate of nations. I have the greatest confidence in one honoured by bearing the letter of the Duke of Parma, and yet in affairs so momentous I must have better evidence than your personal word. Have you any authority for what you have been telling me?'

Clifford drew a packet from his breast, and placed it in her hand. 'It is addressed to myself,' said she, with a smile, so I may take

the liberty of opening it. Yes,' muttered she after she had finished its perusal, 'nothing could be handsomer; nothing could be more complete. The three duchies are guaranteed to Don Carlos. My child will have a principality worthy of him, and I a refuge in my widowhood from the insolence of that detested Prince of Asturias, who ever addresses me as if I were a peasant's daughter. And when, sir,' continued she, turning suddenly to Clifford, and colouring deeply as she recollected the involuntary confidence into which she had been betrayed; 'when will this guarantee be officially notified to the court of Spain, and to the emperor?' 'When the condition, madam, is carried out, and the Cardinal is once more a private man, and in Italy.'

The remark seemed to have called back painful recollections, for the queen covered her face with her hands, and abandoned herself to her own thoughts. Her meditations lasted for some time, and appeared agitated; for not unfrequently, she changed her position, as if under the influence of strong emotion. She looked up at length; there was a tear in either eye, and the face was pale; and it was in

a voice slightly tremulous that she said:

'I accept the conditions, sir; and if it depend upon me, ere a week be over, Alberoni shall have ceased to be prime minister. But now leave me, for our interview has tried my nerves, and I need repose. And yet, ere you go, give your address to the Assa Feta. If I should succeed, you shall be informed of it. And now, farewell.'

She rang a handbell as she spoke. The summons was immediately answered by Donna Laura. Under her guidance, Clifford was once more conducted down the staircase of the Moorish tower, and returned in safety to his own quarters.

# CHAPTER XLII.

# A CONJUGAL ΤÊΤΕ-λ-ΤÊΤΕ.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, the hour at which Elizabeth Farnese generally received a visit from the king. On the present occasion, she evidently expected one; for she was dressed with more than usual care, and every aid which art or nature could supply, was employed to set her off to the best advantage. And now, seated in the recesses of a large fantenil, she awaited the arrival of her husband. The cue she intended to adopt was that of soft melancholy; and happily for the truthfulness of the representation, it was unnecessary to affect it; for her spirits were low, and the excitement which she had for months felt from her anxiety to gain an establishment for her children was now increased to an indefinite extent by the guarantee of the allies. A principality for Don Carlos was almost within her reach: it depended but upon one condition. Would that condition be granted? She hoped so. And yet the uxoriousness of her husband was so mixed up with his obstinacy, that it was impossible to guess at the result. It was, therefore, in no unagitated mood that she saw the door of her apartment open,

and the king enter.

Philip was in gayer spirits than usual. His step was firm; and his large sleepy eye sparkled for the moment with intelligence. His gallantry, too, seemed to have borrowed new strength from his vivacity; for as soon as he had entered, he remarked the sadness imprinted on the countenance of the queen and hastened to her side.

What ails,' said he, 'the best of women? You know I am always miserable when there is a shadow upon your brow,' and he took the hand of his fair helpmate, and bowed on it, after the fashion

of Sir Charles Grandison.

'Ah, flatterer!' said the queen, 'you are like the rest of your

sex-you praise but to deceive.'

'You, my love,' said his Majesty, gallantly, 'have no right to make such a complaint. Your charms would fix any one, even the most fickle. Judge then of their power upon me, the most constant, the most faithful of men.' 'Fair words these,' said the queen, coquettishly, 'but the lip is a bad witness for the memory, and you too may forget when absent.'

'Ungenerous!' said Philip, 'how can you torture me with undeserved suspicions? You know that I have not a desire but for your happiness—not a thought but how to give instant effect to your wishes—not an aspiration but that I might live and die here.'

As he spoke, Philip sank on his knees before her, and clasping her hands between his, imprinted some passionate kisses on the tips of the fair fingers. The adulation apparently produced some effect upon the queen; for in a tone, in which affection and doubt were alike mingled, she whispered:

'Ah! that I could believe you!'

'And why should you not, love?' 'And why should I, carissimo? If a jewel were dropped on the pathway, would not a thousand hands be extended for its possession? Nay, even were it appropriated, would not there still be a perpetual struggle to snatch the prize from the fortunate owner? You are my jewel—earth contains nothing so beautiful. Can you not understand, then, my perpetual dread lest I should be robbed of you and of your affection?'

Philip's face flushed with pleasure at the praises of a person which no one idolized more than himself. In another instant, however, his features became grave; and in a tone of affected modesty, he said:—'It is enough, love, if I meet your approbation; for the dearest object I have on earth is your affection. I would have it

great, overwhelming—such, in short, as mine is for you.'

'And you love me, Philip?' 'Love you! I adore you!—I

worship you!'

'Ah, deceiver! suppose I were to ask you to prove the affection?' 'Ask, and ask boldly,' said her impassioned husband. 'As Ahasuerus said unto Esther of old, would I not give thee even unto the half of my kingdom? Come, what is the request?'

The queen appeared to hesitate.

'Come, my angel,' said the king, fondly, 'I see there is some boon to be asked. Why not name it, and have it granted?

Once more Elizabeth hesitated. It was but for an instant, however; for bending forward, and flinging her arms about his neck, she whispered in his ear: 'Dismiss Alberoni.'

The words seemed to act like a galvanic battery upon Philip; for hurriedly freeing himself from the caresses of his Delilah, he started to his feet, and in accents of inexpressible astonishment, he said:

' Madame, my ears must have deceived me! It is impossible that I can have heard you aright! May I ask you to repeat your words?

'They were simple enough, my dear Philip,' said the queen-

'Dismiss Alberoni.

'Madam, I am still lost in astonishment. It was at your own especial request that I made him prime minister.' 'True: and it is therefore just, if I find the trust unworthily bestowed, that I should be the person to request your Majesty to withdraw it?"

'Why, he is constantly 'But in what has he offended you?"

making war.'

'My love, it was by your own express orders.' 'But then he has been beaten everywhere. He has lost armies, fleets, provinces; I never ordered that.

'That he has been unfortunate, is but too true; but we must charge the ill luck, not to his intentions, but it may be to want of

forethought, combination, or energy.'

'And why, if he has none of these qualities, should he continue what he is? A blundering minister is the ruin of a kingdom; and the ruin would and will be laid at our doors if we, who have the power to dismiss him, retain him in his post only to accumulate on our heads fresh calamities.'

The king shook his head, as if in dissent.

'Is that not enough?' said the queen, pettishly. . 'Would you still defend this man? What can you see to admire in him? But, if you are indifferent to his success as a minister abroad, are you equally so to his want of respect to his sovereign at home?"

'How! he never was disrespectful to me.'

He was so to me. It was but yesterday I asked for some paltry ducats to complete my new summer palace in the mountains. He refused them; and not only refused them, but had further the insolence to tell me, that I thought more of being Countess of San Ildefonso than Queen of Spain.'

'That was wrong-very wrong. The Cardinal should have used no such language. And, yet, forgive me for saying so, there was to

a certain extent an excuse.'

'Ha!' said the queen, haughtily, 'and what was that?'

said your Majesty asked five hundred thousand ducats.'

'Well!' said Elizabeth Farnese, with flashing eyes, 'if I had asked five million, what mattered it? Your namesake expended seven millions and a half in building the Escurial, and why should a king of Spain then be entitled to spend more than one now?"

'But it is you, love, and not I,' said the king, in a soothing tone, 'who are building at San Ildefonso.'

'Well, is it not exactly the same thing? Is this, Sire, your affection? Would you separate the interests of husband and wife?'

'No, no, love. You shall have the money, though I do not well know where it is to come from; for the Cardinal spoke of the country as ruined by the war.'

'The excuse is a paltry one. Alberoni must know that there is money enough in Spain.' 'But,' said Philip, mildly, 'it belongs

to my subjects.'

'No, Sire, it belongs to your Majesty. Did not Père le Tellier, the Jesuit confessor of your grandfather, tell him that all the property of the subject belongs to the sovereign? And do you doubt the word of a priest?' 'No, no, no,' said Philip, crossing himself devoutly; 'I do not dispute that.'

'You will dismiss Alberoni, then?' 'The Cardinal,' said the king, soothingly, 'committed an error in not complying with your wishes. It shall be redressed; you shall have the money you asked for. But as this is your only charge against him, it will be unneces-

sary to dismiss him.'

'But it is not my only charge against him.'

'Why, what other fault find you in him?' 'The man is as ugly

as a baboon, and as rude as a bear!'

'And would you,' said Philip, in accents which made no attempt to veil his astonishment, 'would you have me send away my prime minister for that?' 'Certainly. Is it not sufficient cause? But you do not love me; you never did love me. Your heart and your affections are in the grave of my predecessor. You loved, you love only the Savoyarde!'

And the queen buried her face in her hands, and sinking into one of the corners of her chair, affected to burst into a paroxysm of

sorrow.

It seemed to agitate the king, for he approached and whispered tenderly in her ear: 'You are wrong Elizabeth; I never loved Marie Louise as much as I love you!' 'It is false, treacherous man! You loved her more, and I will prove it. Who won the battle of Almanza?' 'The Duke of Berwick.'

'Who, when your Majesty was a fugitive, destroyed your enemies, and brought you back to Madrid?' 'Why, the Duke of Berwick.'

'Who, in fact, fixed the crown upon your head?' 'I do not dispute it—the Duke of Berwick.'

'Yet this best of all possible friends your Majesty dismissed.

Why?

The king looked conscious, and was silent.

Elizabeth's face brightened with a smile of triumph.

'Well,' said she, in bantering accents, 'if you will not tell me, I will tell you. It was because this Marie Louise—this predecessor of mine—this wife whom you did not love so well as myself, told you he was "a great brute of an Englishman," and that she could

not tolerate at court his boorish manners. Ha! Don Philip, is this

true or not true? Answer me, on your honour.'

'Madam,' said her husband, 'if the Duke of Berwick was dismissed, it was when we had no further use for him, or at least when we could do without him; for Villars supplied his place, and we had in him another general. But you would have me send away Alberoni. How are we to supply his place? Where am I to find another minister?' 'Why not, like your forefathers, be minister yourself?'

'I, minister!!' exclaimed Philip, in accents of astonishment to which no punctuation could do justice. 'Do you think, madam, that I am mad? My great-grandfather tried that whim. He one day quarrelled with Richelieu, and told him he intended to take the

government into his own hands.'

'It was a noble and a brilliant act.'

'So was not the result. Why, madam, within an hour—within an hour, mark me—three waggon loads of papers arrived at the gate of the palace—every packet being marked *immediate*. My great-grand-father had the courage to open five—but he was taken ill with exhaustion as he was untying the sixth! and—'

'And the waggons,' said the queen, with a sneer, 'returned to whence they came, and Richelieu remained in office. I see the trick.'

Madam, it was no trick; it was a great moral lesson. I know none which ever made such a strong impression on me; and I never even think of it, without registering a silent vow that nothing would induce me to imitate the folly of my ancestor.'

'And this is the affection you spoke of! This is the tenderness, the love, you so much vaunted! But I knew it—I was sure of it; Ah! why did my evil fortune ever make me queen of Spain?'

The remark seemed to irritate the king, for he flushed crimson, and once or twice crossed the chamber as if in thought. Suddenly

he stopped in the neighbourhood of the Queen's chair.

'Madam,' said he, in a slightly sarcastic tone, 'to be Queen of Spain is a position which is naturally below the acceptance of any woman, and more especially of one so distinguished as the niece of the high and mighty prince Francis, Duke of Parma and Placentia. But if I have brought the misfortune on you, I can at least remove I have often, as you well know, doubted the validity of the will of Charles II., my predecessor, by which alone I hold this throne. My grandfather on his marriage solemnly renounced, in the face of heaven, all claim to Castile for himself and his descendants; and I feel that I tempt the justice of heaven by continuing to hold a crown which belongs of right to another. Ere long it is my intention to renounce it. As for myself, I will follow the glorious example of my predecessor, the emperor. I will betake me to a monastery, and there in meditation and prayer seek pardon of the Divinity for broken oaths and violated treaties; and you, madam, freed from the burden which you tell me now presses so heavily on you, may seek elsewhere for the happiness which I and my kingdom have in vain attempted to afford you.

As he spoke the king moved towards the table, in the centre of the room, and rung twice with violence a hand-bell that lay on it.

'La Roche,' said he to the premier valet-de-chambre, who had immediately answered the summons, 'lend me your arm;' and leaning on his faithful attendant, Philip left the room unopposed by the queen, who remained paralysed in her chair at the announcement of an intention which her fears had often anticipated, and which threatened such utter ruin to all her varied projects of ambition.

In the mean time Philip pursued his way along the gallery, still supported by his favourite domestic.

La Roche, said the king, at length, in a low faint voice, 'you

are single?' 'I am, Sire.'

'Then, as a friend, I will give you a piece of advice. Be content with that happiness and remain so; for no one,' whispered he, confidentially, 'but the man who has tried it can tell what a thing it is to be married.'

### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### THE FOUR BOTTLES OF VALDEPENAS.

On the following morning Clifford received, through the medium of the Assa Feta, intelligence of the failure of the queen to effect the fall of the Cardinal-minister. The disappointment was felt severely, for, to say the truth, the blow was unexpected, as it was generally understood that the influence of Elizabeth Farnese with her husband was paramount. And so it was in every matter which did not touch upon his own indolence. She might make peace or war, might give rank to officers in the army or civil service, might expend at pleasure the resources of the monarchy; she might, in short, do what she pleased, so long as her whims affected Spain and not its sovereign. But when she asked Philip to exile Alberoni, she went beyond these limits. To dismiss a minister was, in fact, to appoint his successor, and that, in its turn, demanded care, forethought, action; and the king, who cordially detested all three, had stoutly refused to enter upon a course which would have interfered with his lounging in his easy-chair, and disturbed that do-nothing existence which he dignified with the name of philosophy.

Such were the reasons why Elizabeth Farnese had failed. But whatever were the cause, the calamity was felt deeply by Clifford. What pained him scarce less, was the necessity of announcing it to Therese. Yet, ungrateful as the task was, he felt it imperative to make the communication, and as speedily as possible. But how and where? The tale of sorrow could best be told at a personal interview, and yet there was difficulty in finding a place adapted for it. The Casa del Campo, the scene of so many harrowing events, was not to be thought of; and, after long deliberation, it appeared to him that the least-suspected locality would be the residence of Therese herself. It would be easy to approach the palace of Escalona

by the gate in the bye-lane through which he had made his first entrance; while the apartments of the heiress of the mansion were not less accessible; for he had learned incidentally that they opened from a stone terrace, connected by a flight of steps with the garden, and could thus be reached without the necessity of passing through any portion of the main building. By this route, therefore, he determined on seeking Therese's presence, and on José making his appearance, instructed the worthy veteran to announce his intended visit to his mistress, and to be himself in waiting at the garden-gate at ten o'clock.

Some half-hour before the time appointed, Clifford started for the rendezvous. The sky was dark and cloudy, and the streets of the Spanish capital, melancholy at all times from the universally-closed windows, were doubly so under the influence of the shades of night. No lights were visible, except the small lamp which burned at either end of the street, in front of the statue of the Virgin, occupying a niche in the wall. The gloomy thoroughfares were, however, by no means deserted. Here passed a group of ladies, often of the very highest rank, who, (though they kept their features carefully concealed,) by wearing white mantillas, proclaimed their intention of having come forth for a freak. These were surrounded by young gallants, who bantered them with the most extravagant compliments, but who seemingly on many occasions had the worst of the combat, for the replies of their veiled opponents frequently produced shouts of laughter from the companions of the unhappy cavaliers to whom they were addressed, and proved that the retorts In another portion of the street would pass some young noble on horseback, on his way to a meeting with the lady of his love, while on the crupper behind him was seated a well-armed lacquey. At present his business was merely to carry the guitar of his master; but when arrived at the rendezvous he had other and more difficult duties to perform, for he had then not only to hold the horse and act the scout, but not unfrequently to engage in desperate combat, in defending himself or his liege lord against the vengeance of some relative of the worshipped fair one. In a third quarter appeared a lady on a balcony. Below, a cavalier with a guitar would be singing serenades in her honour, while some two or three gallants, friends of the lover, and armed to the teeth, lounged against the wall near him, ready to protect his retreat in case of attack.

Through scenes such as these Clifford made his way. He traversed the Calle Real, and passing through the new street of St. Isidro, entered the Calle de Toledo. In this was the great entrance of the palace of Escalona, lying midway between the young soldier and the Plaza Mayor, or great square. Instead, however, of approaching it, Clifford turned short to the left, and proceeded about two hundred yards up the Street of Segovia. Once more he changed his course, and, turning suddenly to his right, entered the Calle de los Cuchilleros.

It has been already mentioned that it was a long, narrow lane, abounding in curves, and having one side occupied by houses, for the most part of a mean character. On the other was a lofty brick wall, the fence of the extensive gardens of the house of Pacheco, and in this was the door by which he was to be admitted. So great was the darkness, that he had some difficulty in discovering it. Perseverance, however, gave him success; and wrapped in his mantle, he awaited in a dark recess near it the appointed signal. At length the clock of St. Isidro struck ten. As its last chimes died away, Clifford gave the three raps agreed on, whispered the pass-word through the key-hole, and was admitted.

'It is a cold night for your worship,' said José, as he relocked the door; 'but it has one advantage, there will be none in the gardens.

So we may proceed without fear of interruption.'

The old man turned as he spoke, and led the way to the palace by nearly the same route which had formerly been traversed by Clifford. He passed the fountain, but instead of taking the road to the left which led to the great hall, moved straight forward towards the right wing of the building, in which were the apartments of Donna Teresa. He then mounted the steps which led to the terrace, upon which they opened and stopped at a glass-door.

'This, senor, leads to the corridor, and there you will find my young lady awaiting you. I will myself return to the gate, that

I may be ready to reopen it when you leave the garden.

With the words, his guide retired, and Clifford was left alone. He tapped at the door. It was immediately opened by Therese, and the lovers were in each other's arms.

'Hush,' said she, in an agitated tone, as she disengaged herself from his embrace, 'there is danger here. Have you seen any one

since you entered?' 'None, love, but José.'

'Yet there are some abroad to-night who have no right to be near my grandfather's house, or they would not have approached it in disguise. It was about an hour ago—do not laugh, Charles—but though I knew it was impossible for you to be here, I could not help watching for you, when all at once I heard a man's step upon the terrace. At first I fancied it was you, for I thought that you and José might have mistaken the hour. Fortunately, however, I did not stir, for at that moment a tall figure wrapped in a mantle passed by. Great as my terror was, I had the curiosity to open the door gently and watch him. I saw the figure stop opposite Donna Violante's private sitting-room. He—for I am sure that it was a man—rapped, and was admitted, and now I can partly understand by what agency you and my grandfather—on that fearful night—were surprised in the banqueting-hall. What is to be done?'

'Nothing at present,' said Clifford, gallantly, as he pressed the fair girl's hand to his lips; 'nothing but to tell you, Therese, how

truly, how passionately I love you!'

'Óh! Charles, dear Charles, how can you think of these follies at such a moment?'

'It is the very moment to think of them,' said her lover. 'Are

we not together?'

'But the danger'— 'Pshaw! there is none. You say you saw but one man pass, and I have,' continued he, pointing to his pistols, 'the lives of four at my belt; and besides,' added he, with a joyous laugh, 'am I not a perfect master of fence, and able to cope with the most accomplished espadero in Madrid?'

And Therese felt herself reassured, and for a few minutes the lovers abandoned themselves to a relation of their feelings, and those thousand little confidences which so trifling in themselves are yet

so delicious to those who interchange them.

It was only after the first burst of affection was over that Clifford ventured to inform his companion of the melancholy news of which he was the bearer. They filled her with dismay. From her residence in Madrid, and her necessary acquaintance with court gossip, she had been even more impressed than her lover with the extent of the queen's influence, and she had scarcely permitted herself to doubt the success of her interference. To learn, then, the littleexpected result, to the last degree depressed her, as the failure not only announced present calamity, but was ominous of future evil; for who could be expected to persuade Philip to the dismissal of his minister, when even his wife, who for the most part ruled him like a child, had been unable to effect it? Again and again did Therese make her lover read aloud the short note in which Elizabeth Farnese had acknowledged her ill success, and ambiguous as its terms might be to a general reader, to them its language was distinct enough. It confessed in the writer, and suggested to those who pondered on its words—despair.

There was a long silence. It was broken by Clifford.

'And can you, my love, devise nothing?'

'Nothing,' said Therese, as the tears stood in her eyes

'And has your house, the great house of Pacheco, no friends?'

'Alas! none now; for who in Spain has friends willing or powerful enough to face the anger of its first minister? And yet I am unjust; I have one, but he is a humble one: La Roche, the premier

valet of the king.

'Ha!' said Clifford, joyously, 'I had forgotten him. He may be a more valuable ally than you think of, and may perchance for me, as for you, do what no grandee in Spain could accomplish—win me an audience of Philip. By to-morrow I may be able to trace out some plan. So let your taciturn messenger make his appearance regularly during the siesta at the Calle de la Cabeza, and from day to day I will inform you of my success. But it is late, love, and I must be gone; and now—good-night.'

As he spoke, Clifford left the room, and, followed by Therese, proceeded in silence to the terrace. They had gained it, and Clifford was about to depart, when all at once a noise was heard on the further end of it, and a bright stream of light shot across the tesselated payement of the raised pathway. At the same instant a

man's voice was heard in loud tones, mixed occasionally with the notes of a woman's, apparently in entreaty or expostulation.

The lovers stood still in astonishment, and then once more

hurriedly sought shelter in the corridor.

'It is from Donna Violante's room,' whispered Therese. 'The man whom I saw enter is probably about to leave. Wait till he be gone.'

The expected cavalier did not, however, seem in any hurry to take his departure, for again was his voice heard, followed as before by whisperings and entreaties in a lower tone. Some two or three

minutes thus passed, when Clifford lost patience.

'Come,' said he, 'I must go and see who this noisy gentleman is. Nay, love,' continued he, as Therese whispered her fears, 'there is no danger. We will remain within the shadow of the wall, and without being seen, can soon solve this mystery.'

He drew a pistol from his belt, and with a stealthy step moved along the terrace, while Therese accompanied him, clinging nervously to his left arm. They soon approached the light, and keeping themselves shrouded in the darkness, had the chamber of the duenna

and its occupants brought distinctly to their view.

In a large arm-chair, near the table in the centre of the room, sat our worthy friend, Benedict Di Castro. Some half-dozen bottles were upon the table, and the jolly priest seemed to have absorbed their contents, for he was hopelessly drunk, his black gown open, his body bent, his legs stretched out to their extreme length, and his whole face stamped with the expression, by which inebriety in its last stage seeks to counterfeit wisdom. He did not seem, however, as yet to have relinquished his potations, for he held a tumbler firmly in his left hand, while he made a not very successful effort to fill it with his right. Around him flitted his guardian angel of fifty, at one moment endeavouring to wrest the bottle from his grasp, and at another entreating him to be gone while he could yet walk.

'Now, Benedict, my dear Benedict, you must positively have no more liquor—you have had too much already; come now, there is a dear, good man. See I have opened for you the window which leads to the terrace; so put down the bottle, Di Castro, and here is

your hat.'

'It is the Italian priest—the friend of Alberoni,' whispered

Therese to Clifford.

'Favete linguis!' hiccuped out the worthy friend of the Cardinal. 'Bah! I thought I was in the Seminario at Parma. Pocas palabras, Donna Violante; hold your tongue, I say. I will not stir a foot. What, leave you! my little butter-pat of a woman—my beauty—my Venus—my angel!' and the holy father winked at the duenna in a manner which was by no means orthodox.

The admiration seemed only to terrify the fair lady, for she

exclaimed, in an agitated voice:

'Now do not speak so loud, Father Benedict—do not now, for the love of the Virgin!'

- 'A fiddlestick for the Virgin! It is you that I am in love with.'
- 'Oh! what words, what dreadful words!' exclaimed the horrorstruck duenna.
- 'Yes, it's true, perfectly true,' replied her admirer, with drunken gravity. 'You are a thousand times handsomer than that black doll in the church of Atocha, though they have given her a mantilla of Mechlin lace, and a petticoat of Lyons silk, and a string of pearls round her neck, each of them as big as a plover's egg.'

'Oh, por Dios!' muttered his scandalized companion.

'What!' said the irritated ecclesiastic, at what he thought an attempt to dispute his opinion, 'do you think that I, Benedict Di Castro, don't know? Have not I seen them a thousand times? Have not I calculated a thousand times that each of them was worth a cask of the best wine in Spain? If I had the wearing of them, I know how they should go!' And fired by the association, the jolly priest struck up, at the top of his voice, 'Valdepenas, Valdepenas,' a celebrated Spanish drinking-song, whose stanzas were devoted to the praises of the liquor in question.

Donna Violante rushed towards him, and endeavoured to stop his choral efforts by placing one hand upon his mouth, while with the other, after the fashion of her country, she gesticulated violently,

exclaiming at intervals:

'Oh, the Virgin! Oh, the saints! Oh, Father Benedict! I

shall be ruined, I tell you; you will wake the house!'

'Bah!' said Di Castro, snapping his fingers, and in tones of infinite contempt; 'I don't care that for the house. Per Bacco! if it were not that you insisted upon my drinking so much liquor, and that I am slightly overtaken, I could thrash every man in it.'

'Oh!' screamed the duenna, thunderstruck at the presumption:

'if he heard you, what would the Grand Chamberlain say?'

'Not much, my love, if you but wait for a week. We are going

to take his head off. Julio and I decided upon it last night.'

Clifford passed his arm round the waist of his companion, or the poor girl from terror would have fallen to the ground. He, himself, continued to listen eagerly to the conversation.

'Ah, you wretches!' said the soft-hearted duenna, 'you ought to

be ashamed of yourselves.'

'What for? for taking off a grander's head? Pooh! much you know about the matter. In Spain there is nothing gives so much

respectability to an administration.'

'And would you,' sobbed Donna Violante, 'would you really wish to bring the old man to so dreadful a fate?' 'Nothing dreadful about it. I will confess him myself; and I can tell you a man is not to be pitied who is confessed in extremis by a canon of St Jago. He dies in the very odour of sanctity—sure of it. And I would not charge him a maravedi for the job: after all the good liquor I have drunk from his cellar, I were a Jew or a heathen even to dream of such a thing.'

The duenna seemed little comforted by the prospect of the many

advantages which were to attend the dying moments of the grand chamberlain.

'And to think,' said she sobbing, 'that you are going to ruin the old man, and that after all the happy days which I have spent in

this house, I shall be obliged to leave it.'

- 'Pooh! pooh! don't vex yourself about that, my beauty,' said her companion, with a hiccup. 'I will give you better quarters. You shall be my housekeeper. Are you properly conscious of the honour? I doubt it. You think me only a canon of St. Jago. Nothing of the sort. I am confessor elect to his Catholic Majesty Philip V., King of Spain and the Indies.' And the worthy ecclesiastic, in order to do justice by his attitude to his new honours, attempted to raise himself in his chair; but the effort was too much for him, and the head once more sunk down upon his shoulder.
- 'Oh, Benedict! you are very drunk indeed, when you talk such nonsense,' said the duenna, losing her temper at what she thought was an attempt to impose upon her. 'You know Father D'Aubenton is the confessor.'
- 'Pooh! pooh! you speak in ignorance, woman. That rogue of a Jesuit is to be turned off next week, and I am to be put in his place—Julio insists on it. He says I am the only man in Spain fit for the office.'

The duenna shook her head in contemptuous incredulity. The

priest saw the gesture, and it roused him to fury.

'What! you doubt!' said he. 'I begin to suspect, Donna Violante, that you are nothing better than a heathen; for you do not believe: and what is a heathen but an unbelieve? But I will convert you. Bah! with the aid of the Holy Office, that is nothing. I will do more: I will convince you—I will put you to shame. I will show you the litera scripta—you shall have the very text for it.'

He drew, as he spoke, from the inside of his vest, though with some difficulty, a large, greasy pocket-book, from the interior of

which he took a letter.

'Read that,' said he, with an air of great dignity, 'read that, woman, and be convinced. Ay, and read it aloud, too; for it does my ears good to hear it.'

The duenna complied—probably moved, partly by curiosity, and partly by a wish not to irritate further her unmanageable companion

-and read as follows:

"My dear Benedict," ('That's me,' hiccuped the priest.)
"I must insist on your becoming father confessor to the king.
On the 8th the affair of the grand chamberlain will be over. On the evening of that day, I will dismiss D'Aubenton, and thus get quit of both my enemies at once. On the 8th, therefore, you will be installed in your new office. So be ready and be sober.

"Yours affectionately,—Julio."

'Well, what do you think of that?' said Di Castro, as he took the letter, and replaced it in the pocket-book. 'I suppose you know

who Julio is? It's Alberoni-it's the Cardinal-it's the prime minister of Spain—it's my friend. A great man! only subject occasionally to unjust suspicions, and having the odd fancy that all his acquaintance have a disposition to intemperance. But who is perfect? said he, nodding his head with drunken gravity. 'Alas! alas! Donna Violante! "Non cuivis contigit adire Corinthum"-I forget the chapter of the Breviary. I sometimes fancy that even I have my weaknesses, my follies, my—' But the sentence was never destined to be completed; for the liquor and the long oration which he had just uttered had produced their effect. The priest's eyes closed, his head fell back on the chair, and the pocket-book containing the precious letter dropped upon the ground. As for the poor duenna, she seemed to have fairly lost her senses; for terrified at the thought of Di Castro being found in her room, and unable to devise any means of getting quit of him, she hurried wildly round the apartment, wringing her hands convulsively, and calling for aid upon every saint in the calendar.

The scene which we have described had been watched with eager interest by Clifford and Therese. The words uttered by the priest with reference to the Duke of Escalona had for the moment terrified his grandchild. By degrees, however, she recovered her self-possession and awaited with breathless curiosity the result of the tête-à-tête. The fall of the pocket-book had not escaped the keen eyes of Clifford. In a moment he had pondered, decided, and

acted.

'Therese, my love,' whispered he, 'upon the possession of that pocket-book depends your grandfather's life. Leave me with the speed of light. Re-enter the corridor, and approach the door which leads to it from this room. Call loudly for the duenna; she will instantly, from the fear of your entering her apartment, obey your summons. In the mean time, in her absence, I will enter from the window, and carry off the precious pocket-book from this sleeping drunkard. Do you understand?

'Perfectly. But how shall I know of your success?'

'Give me your mantilla. If all goes well, you will find it on the terrace at the entrance of the corridor.'

There was a hurried embrace—the lips touched—the mantilla was left in her lover's hand—and the young girl was gone. Clifford once more turned his eager eyes towards the priest and Donna Violante. The former still slept heavily; the latter continued to move with the air of a bacchante round the room. All at once she started, her face became pale with horror, and she clasped her hands more wildly than before.

'Oh! Holy Mother!' exclaimed she, 'there is Donna Teresa's voice, and she is calling me. If she enter here I am lost. I must prevent her,' and with a glance of intense anger and scorn at her

unconscious companion, she hurried from the chamber.

Half-an-hour had clapsed, and Therese once more stepped upon the terrace. There was no figure to intercept the light, but by the door of the corridor lay the mantilla. She grasped it eagerly, and tears of joy streamed down her cheeks, for there was something which whispered to her heart that her grandfather's life was saved.

## CHAPTER XLIV

#### THE PASS-WORD OF ST. IGNACIO.

CLIFFORD had obtained the precious pocket-book. He had had no difficulty in securing it. The jolly canon of St. Jago was too much exhausted with his oratory and his liquor to be conscious of the attempt on his property, and the intruder, with the papers in his possession, made his way to the garden-gate. There José was at his post, and having, through the medium of his key, gained the lane, he returned to the Calle de la Cabeza. The hour was late, but he was too agitated to sleep, and he spent the greater part of the night sunk in the recesses of his chair, and meditating upon the best mode of employing a prize so valuable. That the exhibition of it, to the eyes of D'Aubenton, would destroy the friendship between him and the Cardinal, Clifford did not doubt; but the difficulty was to find the means of placing the important document in the hands of the king's confessor. Something more even was necessary. To produce disunion was not sufficient. What was required was to make that disunion tend to the dismissal of the prime minister by connecting the animosity of the Jesuit with his interests.

It was notorious that a cardinal's hat was the great object of D'Aubenton's ambition. Could this be obtained only through the medium of Alberoni, the father confessor might possibly smother his resentment, lest it might be a bar to the fulfilment of his hopes of the purple; but if his ambition could be gratified by other agency, there was little doubt that he would do his best to effect the ruin of a man convicted of the double crime of having deceived him, and of

being no longer able to aid his rise.

The road to success with the confessor of the king was then plain enough. His vindictive spirit was to be roused by the production of Alberoni's letter to Di Castro, and his interested nature tempted by the promise of a cardinal's hat from the Duke of Orleans. Yet for all this an interview was necessary. A mere abstract statement of the two facts—the treachery of the prime minister, and the favourable feeling of the Regent of France towards the confessor, however well authenticated either might be—was not sufficient. Human minds are like iron: a single blow produces but little impression. It is by the continuous application of the external agency that the metal becomes heated, and it was only by the reiterated arguments of a personal conference, that the mind of the Jesuit could be welded to the purposes of the young diplomatist, and a pledge won from him of his co-operation. How was such a conference to be obtained?

On this, Clifford pondered long and anxiously. At length his ideas took a definite shape. On the following day there was to be a

Funcion, or religious procession, in which, as a matter of course, D'Aubenton would play his part, and at this, Clifford hoped it might be possible to approach him. The effort was at least worth making, nor did it appear either difficult or dangerous. A momentary approximation was all that was necessary. The confessor of the king was in the habit of receiving petitions, and the mere circumstance of a person thrusting a paper into his hand was not likely to be remarked, the more especially as the darkness would lend its aid; for the procession did not move till four in the afternoon, and would not approach the convent until sundown.

The attempt being thus decided on, as it might be necessary to inform Therese of its success or its failure, instructions were given to José, who had appeared at the usual hour, to be in waiting at the garden-gate in the Calle de los Cuchilleros at ten o'clock. This done,

Clifford set about preparing for his enterprise.

He had obtained from Perez the secret of the gipsy dye, and been taught how to use it. This he now applied, and dressed in the costume of a citizen of Madrid, wrapped in his large cloak and attended by his host, whose knowledge of court notorieties was necessary to point out the object of his search, he left his quarters. In the event of his being fortunate enough to get near the confessor, he had prepared a packet which he intended to place in his hand.

In the mean time, the hours passed on, and the procession commenced its march. Night had fallen, but the darkness added only to the brilliancy of the scene. The whole line of buildings from the Palace to the Plaza Mayor, and from the Plaza Mayor to the end of the street of Atocha, was decorated in the gayest fashion; the exterior of the houses being entirely covered with rich carpets. The windows were illuminated by wax tapers, and numerous others of immense size blazed in the balconies. These were crowded with all the rank and beauty of Madrid, each lady being in her richest dress, and covered with diamonds and jewellery.

Below moved the actors in the pageant. The road was cleared by a regiment of guards. Behind, at intervals, came alternate bodies of troops and friars. With these were intermingled deputations from the clergy of every parish of the capital, having, in the midst of them, stages carried upon men's shoulders, and covered above with groups of figures, as large as life, representing persons in Scripture history. Towards the centre, and in the place of honour, walked the king himself, with the most distinguished persons of the Court, all bearing wax-tapers in their hands; and for four hours did the long file of human beings pass on.

The building itself, the destination of the marshalled multitude, was not unworthy of the splendour affected by its intended in-

mates.

In 1719, the church of Atocha, on occasions when a Funcion or religious ceremony was to be represented within its walls, was, to the inhabitants of Madrid, precisely what the opera-house is to the

fashionable denizens of the modern capitals of Europe. The ecclesiastical theatre, like its lay sister, had its music and dancing, its scenery, machinery, dresses, and decorations. The nave and aisle of the sacred edifice were decorated with orange-trees, pomegranates, jessamines, and myrtles of great height, which grew in buckets of silver, and now extended in long avenues, and now described a circle round some marble fountain.

Above, and on every side, were cages of gold wire, filled with nightingales, linnets, and canaries; while the whole was illuminated by a thousand wax-tapers of immense size, whose light flashed on jewellery, and gold plate, and the rich uniforms of the military, or lost itself in the gloom of the vaulted roof. In front of the great altar, and up to the very pronouncing of the Benediction, danced beautiful boys with castanets in their hands; their movements varied at intervals by the more solemn but not less carefully-studied evolutions of the officiating priesthood.

It was a strange scene, that mixture of men of the gown and of the sword—of the blasts of trumpets, and the voices of choristers. and the click of castanets, and the sound of falling water-of Pagan rites and Christian ceremonial—of the worship of the Phænician goddess Astarte and the Catholic divinity the negro Virgin of Atocha, which has no parallel in modern times, and which, but for the detailed accounts of contemporary writers, would have been believed, at a period so little distant from our own, as altogether incredible.

Clifford did not join the procession, but hurried on to the church itself, in the hope that the pressure of the crowd might give him an excuse for communicating with the confessor-a thing the more simple as the Spanish Court, according to the habit of the country, was for the most part little surrounded by guards, and easy of approach. But the anticipations of the envoy were not destined to be realized. It had become the policy of Alberoni to impress upon the king's mind suspicion of all around him; and on the present occasion, as if in anticipation of treachery or violence, Philip and his attendants, instead of mixing with the people, were jealously encircled by a strong body of armed men, who interposed an impenetrable barrier between the royal cortège and the spectators.

Clifford had thus nothing for it but to wait patiently till the conclusion of the ceremony gave him an opportunity of leaving the It was late ere he was able to accomplish this, and instead of returning home, he bent his steps towards the Calle de los Cuchilleros, and awaited patiently in the neighbourhood of the garden-gate the hour of ten. At the appointed time José was at his post. Clifford entered, and in another minute the lovers were

once more together.

To Therese, Clifford detailed his disappointment, and an anxious consultation was held as to the best method of effecting the delivery of the important letter. Many were the plans proposed, only to be rejected; and as each newly-created scheme fell to pieces before their eyes, their spirits became more depressed, for it was already the second of the month, and in four days more would arrive the fatal hour fixed for the trial, or in other words, the condemnation of

the grand chamberlain. Clifford spoke at length:

Yes, love, said he, 'I have failed in delivering the letter to the Jesuit, and yet in that letter is our only chance of safety. When I questioned you of the friends of the house of Pacheco, you said there was one still remaining, and that was La Roche, the premier valet-de-chambre of the king. It occurs to me that he might do something to aid us in our present emergency. He must, from his position, have paramount influence over the domestics of the palace, and it is probable that he could contrive to have the letter delivered to D'Aubenton. It is no great favour to ask of him, if, indeed, he feel the gratitude to your family which he so loudly expresses. You must send for him, love, to-morrow, and get him to undertake the task, for I see no other way in which we can accomplish it.'

Therese assented, and received the precious packet, though with no confidence in its efficacy. Scotti had refused to aid them; Elizabeth Farnese had attempted it, and failed. The confessor was now their only remaining hope, yet every hour proved the difficulty of summoning him to an interview; and it was by no means certain, even in the event of his granting it, if he would involve himself in hostilities with a man so unscrupulous and determined as Alberoni. Such were the doubts, shadowing out a dark future, which pressed heavily on their minds, and made tears stream down the cheeks of Therese. Clifford did his best to kiss them away, but she would not be comforted; and the representative of Lord Stanhope, with a heavy heart, departed to his home.

The sorrow, however, of the heiress of the grand chamberlain, deep as it was, did not paralyze her. She had all the energy of her countrywomen. The dames of the north have much passive endurance. They bear misfortune, and bear it well. Those of the south do more, they struggle against it and act. On the following morning La Roche was summoned to the palace of Escalona. He came, as before, at mid-day, and Therese in a few words expressed to him her wishes. She would have added some explanations of the contents of the missive intended for the confessor, but La Roche

refused to listen to them.

'No, no, my dear young lady,' said he, 'I know nothing of what is contained in this packet, and wish to know nothing; and if you have any ulterior object in its delivery, I pray of you to keep it in your own breast. The premier valet of Philip V is entitled to transmit a letter to the confessor of his Majesty, but he is not entitled to know of or aid any plans which may have a political result.'

But the packet, Monsieur la Roche, is of the last importance. How will you transmit it to Father D'Aubenton? How will you be certain that it does not fall into wrong hands?'

'That now, Mademoiselle Therese,' said the premier valet, with a

smile, 'is one of my secrets. The means I will not tell; but be assured of this, that ere many hours are over, your letter will be in the hands of the confessor. But I must now bid you adieu, for his Majesty is restless of late, and I dare not be long absent.'

And La Roche made his bow and left the room.

'That girl,' muttered he to himself, as he slowly paced his way towards the palace, 'is exposing me to greater danger than she dreams of; and yet, poor thing! who can blame her? Her grandfather's life is on the cards, and for her mother's sake I must help her to play them. But how to get quit of this packet without putting myself into the power of that rogue of a Jesuit, I know not. To deliver it myself would but awaken inquiry; to entrust it to one of the domestics, half of whom, to my knowledge, are in the pay of the Cardinal, would be to risk its safety. Ha! now I think of it. D'Aubenton keeps the cabinet that opens from his bedroom constantly locked. It is there he stores up his private papers, and there he has the reputation of retiring to study before he goes to rest. I know how to enter it. The rooms which contain the King's wardrobe adjoin, and the Jesuit little suspects that this Alcazar of the Moors abounds in secret staircases and sliding panels, and that, prowling about the old den, I have chanced to find one which gives access to his sanctum. By it will I introduce the letter. Sooner or later he must see it, and one advantage of the plan is, that it can fall into no other hands but his own.'

It was about ten o'clock on the same evening that D'Aubenton left the queen's drawing-room. He had formed part of the royal circle, at which also Alberoni and the ambassador of Parma had been present. The Jesuit entered his bedroom, and removing the black robe of his order, supplied its place with a dressing-gown, which seemed to be worn in hours of study or labour, for its sleeves exhibited no unfrequent stains of ink.

'I am weary,' muttered he to himself; 'and yet I know not how it is, I feel as if I could not sleep. Alberoni was scarcely so courteous to-night as usual, and his sycophant Scotti, who ever models himself on the manner of the minister, positively rude. It is not worth vexing myself about; and yet I hear nothing further from him of my cardinal's hat. Let me see what says the last note from Fernando Duran. The Prime Minister of Spain little dreams that his right-hand man, the Marquis of Tolosa, reveals every secret of his office to the confessor of the king.'

As he spoke, he drew from the pocket of an inner vest a key of curious workmanship, and applied it to the lock of a door which opened from the bed-chamber. It admitted him to a room of moderate size, wainscoted with cak, and having its alternate panels filled with staring portraits, the size of life, of grim old warriors. Two or three ebony cabinets occupied the intervals between the pictures, while in the centre was a table covered with a small

Turkey carpet. D'Aubenton proceeded to one of the escritoires, and unlocking it, drew from a secret recess in the interior a bundle of labelled letters. This done, he approached the table, and placing on it his lamp, was about to seat himself, when all at once his eye was attracted by a sealed packet lying on the desk which contained his writing-materials. It was superscribed, 'Vicit Leo ex tribu Judee.' The priest let the bundle of papers in his hand fall to the ground, and seized eagerly the missive, exclaiming, 'Ha! the password of St. Ignacio! How comes this here? and what are its contents?'

He tore the envelope open as he spoke, and with an anxious eye examined the missives within. They consisted of two letters, one of which bore, on its exterior, the same Latin motto as the envelope, together with a mark in the corner, and to this the Jesuit immediately addressed himself. It was written in cypher, but that to the practised eye of the father confessor, offered no obstacle.

'A letter from the General himself,' said he. 'It tells nothing; yet the matter must be of rare importance, for it is no trifle which would induce that proud brute, Le Tournemine, to take the pen in his own hand. And he refers me to the bearer for an explanation of his wishes. Mysterious enough,' continued the priest; 'but let us see what says the agent,' and he eagerly turned to the paper which formed the second portion of the contents of the enclosure. It contained the following words:

'The bearer requests of Father D'Aubenton the favour of an interview at twelve o'clock on the night of the third of the present month, by the fountain in the centre of the Plaza de Cebada. Should it not be convenient for the reverend father to give the meeting upon the third, the bearer will await him on the spot designated, at

the same hour, on the nights of the fourth and the fifth.'

'Pleasant!' muttered D'Aubenton to himself, as he laid down the papers. 'Pleasant, I say, to be summoned forth to a conference at such an hour, and on such a night as this. Yet go I must, for who can tell what may not be lost by twenty-four hours' delay? But I am too well known in Madrid to risk hearing the fellow's message in the Haymarket. I must take him to the College of the Jesuits, and ere I make my way to the Plaza de Cebada, will send orders to get my private room ready; for there must be something in the wind, or the General would not have thought it worth his while to take a part in the mystery.'

As he spoke, D'Aubenton once more entered his sleeping-room, and resumed his cassock. Instead, however, of his usual long, shovel hat, he took from a closet a broad-brimmed sombrero, and large mantle, similar to those worn by the citizens of Madrid; and having donned both with the air of one familiar with their use,

hastily left the palace.

## CHAPTER XLV

## THE COLLEGE OF THE JESUITS.

IT was midnight, and the Plaza de Cebada was deserted. Inhabited chiefly by those classes who obtain their bread by their daily toil, there was but little disposition on the part of its residents to spend their time abroad after sundown, and the Haymarket was in itself too unfashionable a locality to attract those who, during the night, formed the locomotive part of the population—the higher classes of the community. As Clifford then approached the rendezvous, there was nothing to interrupt his progress, and he took his place by the side of the large fountain in the centre of the square. A quarter of an hour had elapsed, and still no one made his appearance. At length, he heard steps approaching, and a figure wrapped in a mantle became visible in the darkness. The new-comer paced deliberately twice round the fountain, bending on Clifford as he passed, a pair of clear, dark eyes, whose bright glance showed itself even in the night. As he terminated his second round, he stopped suddenly, and addressed him.

'You watch late, caballero,' said he. 'Wait you for any one?'

'Yes; for a friend.'

'Whence comes he?' 'From the old house in Guipuscoa.'

'Senor,' said the new-comer, 'you have the countersign, but this place is too public for our conference, and we may be disturbed.

Do me the favour to follow me.'

The speaker moved off at a rapid pace, closely followed by Clifford. After threading several streets, they found themselves in front of a large conventual-looking building, but the man in the mantle, instead of approaching the great gate, turned aside into a bye-lane which flanked it, and stopped at a low, modest-looking door, which apparently led into one of the wings of the gloomy edifice. He tapped at the wicket, and it was immediately opened by a lay brother, in the habit of the Order of Jesus. The Janitor bowed with deep respect to the new arrival.

'You got my orders, Francesco?'

'I did, your reverence. Everything is prepared.'

The muffled stranger entered; and making a sign to Clifford to follow him, turned to the right along a narrow passage, and entered a room at the end of it. It was low, of moderate size, and wainscoted, and had its walls ornamented by one or two pictures of saints from the hands of Spanish artists. The furniture was to the last degree plain, yet the room presented a comfortable appearance; for the floor was carpeted, a large fire burned on the hearth, and two wax-tapers stood upon the table in the centre.

The windows were veiled with hangings of dark brown cloth, and it was impossible to ascertain in what direction they looked, but from the perfect stillness which reigned without, probably on the garden of the monastery. Everything, in short, seemed to intimate that the apartment had been selected for its privacy, for Clifford

remarked that the entrance to it from the passage had double doors,

both of which were in turns carefully closed by his guide.

As soon as they were alone, the man in the mantle threw it aside, and invited Clifford to follow his example. The injunction was immediately complied with, and D'Aubenton and his companion stood face to face. With the appearance of the former, the envoy was already familiar. The father confessor had been pointed out to him in the church of Atocha, and he had studied carefully his person and features—a scrutiny the less necessary as he had already, by the British ambassador and Dubois, been made acquainted with the character of the Jesuit—his vaulting ambition, his unscrupulous nature, his vindictiveness, his sycophancy to his superiors, his arrogance to those of whom he believed himself independent.

Of Clifford, on the contrary, the confessor was entirely ignorant. He was, of course, aware that he was the bearer of a letter from Father le Tournemine, the General of the Jesuits, the private marks on which signified that he was a man to be trusted; but beyond this he knew nothing. Nor rigid as was the discipline of his fraternity, was he disposed to give more obedience to the mandate of his superior than he found convenient. Keen supporter as he was of the interests of the disciples of Loyola, there was one to whose cause he had vowed even a more implicit devotion, and that was

himself.

Whatever were the claims of his order, and however ready he might be to advance them in any circumstances with which he was personally unconnected, they were always held as subordinate to his own; and thus he was prepared to receive, with a suspicion which was alike the result of his conventual education and his own nature, the advances of an emissary, whose personal character and whose objects were both as yet a mystery. It was therefore with a keen eye that he surveyed his new acquaintance, as if he would have read in the features of the young soldier, what reasons there might be for trusting him if honest, or for baffling him if otherwise.

The scrutiny was thus long and careful, yet it gathered little. The expression of Clifford was that of a bold man, but beyond that, it told nothing. Ability or the absence of it were alike veiled beneath that disguise, of all others the most difficult to penetrate—a smile. The Jesuit had no alternative, therefore, but to commence the conference, and trust to the details it might develop for grounds

upon which to rest an opinion as to the future.

'Senor caballero,' said he, in those quiet insinuating tones which became him so well, 'I presume it was from you that I received a letter?' Clifford bowed.

'It had inscribed upon it five words?'

'Vicit Leo ex tribu Juda.'

'Precisely. They are words that intimate that—'

'That the General of the Order had a message to deliver to one of his most distinguished brethren, and bespoke his confidence in the messenger.'

'I understand,' said D'Aubenton, with a slight bow. 'Father'—continued he; and again he paused. 'Father le Tournemine

takes a tender interest in the confessor of King Philip.'

- 'I doubt it not,' said D'Aubenton, in a meek tone. 'Thanks be to Heaven! such affection is entertained by all the disciples of Loyola for their brethren. And yet,' added he, 'gratifying as must be the knowledge of such sympathies, I can searcely believe that the senor caballero has come all the way from Paris merely to apprise me of them.' 'The reverend father is right. The General not only feels the affection, but would prove it.'
  - 'And you are here for the purpose of offering the proof?'

The envoy bowed.

'Will you condescend to explain to me the benignant intentions

of my superior?'

'Father le Tournemine,' said Clifford, 'has long been aware of the lustre conferred on the disciples of Loyola by counting you among the number of their members.'

'How amiable!' lisped the Jesuit. 'How flattering of Father le

Tournemine!'

'The General had hoped that his distinguished brother had long ere this been elevated to the purple, the more especially as he had understood that the all-powerful Cardinal-minister had pledged himself to the procuring of it!'

There was a pause, as if an affirmation or negative had been expected, but neither was made. The Jesuit merely smiled, and his

companion continued:

'The merits of your reverence having been thus strangely over-looked, Father le Tournemine has felt it his duty, as head of the Order, to place you in the lofty position to which your services so justly entitle you. He accordingly suggested to his Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans to demand of his Holiness a place for you in the Sacred College.'

D'Aubenton gave a slight start. It was the first time he had shown anything like interest in the conversation. The feeling, however, whatever it was, was instantly subdued, and in a voice as

unimpassioned as before, he replied:

'And what said the regent?' 'That he would have the greatest

possible pleasure in making the application.'

'Indeed!' 'Yes, indeed. Nay, more, his Royal Highness added, that considering the full and entire amity which at the present moment subsists between himself and the Holy See, he did not doubt that the request would be immediately successful.'

A flush came over D'Aubenton's cheek, and for awhile not a word was uttered. It was possible that he expected Clifford to continue the conversation, but on finding him preserve an obstinate

silence, he was compelled to take up the ball in his turn.

'It is a high honour,' said he, 'for one of the house of Bourbon, to concern himself about a simple priest; and yet, to believe public report, the regent never acts but from motives of interest. A

cardinal's hat is a princely gift. Is it possible that he expects at my hands any favour in return?' What could he seek of a church-

man, save to promote Christian charity and brotherly love?'

'Undeniable virtues both,' said the Jesuit, with a sneer; 'but would you condescend to inform me as to the precise mode in which I am expected to give them my support?' 'That it is my province to explain. The King of Spain is a near kinsman of the King of France and of the Regent, and yet, notwithstanding their mutual affection and the ties of blood, there has been almost constant war between them.' D'Aubenton gave a groan.

'It is a lamentable fact,' said he; 'one never sufficiently to be reprobated by the ministers of religion.' 'I am happy in the concurrence of your reverence. That war is the act of an evilminded man, who has laboured unceasingly to excite hostility to

Louis XV and the Duke of Orleans.'

Once more the Jesuit groaned aloud.

'Under these circumstances, the regent felt he could not do a greater kindness to one so distinguished for his piety as the confessor of the King of Spain, than to give him an opportunity of removing the cause of such unchristianlike squabbles.'

'And who,' said the Jesuit, quietly, 'is the man you speak of?'

'The Cardinal minister.'

'There is a Cardinal-minister in France as well as in Spain. Which

mean you?' 'Alberoni.'

The priest was silent. To all appearance he was meditating upon the religious duties thus recommended to his notice. In fact, he was calculating whether at Rome, the interest of Alberoni or the regent were the greatest. He came to the conclusion that the Spanish minister was the stronger man.

'I cannot,' said he, at length, 'sufficiently express my gratitude for the favour offered me by the Duke of Orleans.' 'Then you accept

it?' said Clifford eagerly.

'No, I refuse it.' Clifford looked astonished.

'Is it possible,' continued he, 'that you are content to bury all your talents in obscurity, and waste, in a private station, energies which should raise you to the purple, or even to the triple crown?'

'Alas! my friend,' replied the priest, 'energies and abilities I have none; you greatly overrate my poor qualities. My present station is a modest one, and suits me; but if ever I should make up my mind to forsake the calm happiness and repose which it offers, I have determined that I will be indebted for my new honours to the hand of friendship.'

'And may I ask the name of the friend who is so powerful?'

' Alberoni.'

'Alberoni!' said Clifford in astonishment. 'Why, but now, you reprobated his conduct.' 'Pardon me, my son, I applied the term to the unholy war between France and Spain.'

'But you agreed with me in thinking the Cardinal was the cause of it.' 'l'ardon me again, my son. I agreed with you in thinking

that he must be an evil-minded man who would excite hostility to princes so amiable as Louis XV and the Duke of Orleans.'

'And yet you yourself have suffered from the arts of the Italian. To you he made a promise, and you, like others, has he deceived.'

Once more, my young friend, you are in error. He did not forget

the kind intention—he only delayed it.'

'And will your reverence permit me to ask—for I must report to his Royal Highness the Regent, the result of this conference—has he again renewed the promise?'

D'Aubenton nodded.

'Of late?' Again D'Aubenton gave a sign of assent.

'And you will trust him once more? Forgive me for saying so, it is madness.' 'Alas! alas! it is thus that the children of darkness speak of what they know not. They cannot understand the holy bonds which bind together, in love and confidence, those who have devoted themselves to the duties of religion.'

Clifford shook his head.

'I see how it is, my young friend,' said the Jesuit, compassionately, 'you are of the world, and judge like a worldling. Well, for once, I will endeavour to forget my sacred calling and the feelings which it generates, and speak to you as one of yourselves. Why came you hither?'

Clifford coloured, but he said nothing.

'I will tell you. Alberoni is a thorn in the side of the Duke of Orleans. To secure his possession of the regency he would have him displaced, and knowing well my intimacy with the king, would use it for effecting his purpose. Is it not so?'

Clifford was still silent.

'I am right, then. It is to purchase that influence he offers a cardinal's hat. The splendour of the bribe is evidence of the power of him who is asked to accept it.'

He paused as if expecting a reply, but none was made.

'You answer not. It matters little; I repeat what I said. The promised favours of the regent only prove that he believes that it

is in my power to change the government.'

'On that point,' said Clifford, eagerly, 'I am happy to be able to speak frankly. No one doubts, nor is his Royal Highness ignorant, that upon the support or hostility of the director of the royal conscience depends the fate of the prime minister of Spain.' 'Yes, my friend,' said D'Aubenton, gratified in spite of himself at the acknowledgment of his influence, 'I have the power. It is the consequence of my office. And now you see why, supposing I squared my conduct by worldly motives, I need have no fear of Alberoni's not keeping his pledge.'

'Because you are father confessor?' 'Because I am father

confessor.'

'But if—pardon the frankness of a novice—you were not the director of the king's conscience, would you have the same confidence in the promises of the Cardinal?'

D'Aubenton, in spite of his triple mail of assurance, coloured and looked embarrassed.

'My dear friend,' said he at length, 'you speak of impossibilities.'

'In what?' 'In supposing me not father confessor.'

'Yet such a thing has been. Forgive me for the painful reminiscence, but you have been displaced once already.' 'True,' said the Jesuit, colouring with vexation; 'but that was in the time of Louis XIV Philip held his crown by the aid of his grandfather, and could not refuse obeying him.'

'Still an event which has happened might happen again.' 'I

repeat, impossible.'

But supposing the possibility, would you have the same confidence in the promises of the Cardinal?'

Disciplined as the Jesuit's features were, they could not disguise

from the quick eye of the envoy a shade of anxiety.

'My dear friend,' said he, in a coaxing tone, 'you ask the question as if you had a meaning.' 'Allow me, your reverence, to answer one question by another. Supposing you found it was the intention of the Cardinal to deprive you of the confessorship, what would be your inference?'

The priest drew himself up haughtily, as if he had received an insult. 'Senor caballero,' said he, 'it is unnecessary to waste our time in vain imaginings. We had better terminate the conference.' And he moved towards his mantle. 'Pardon me,' said the envoy, placing his back against the door, 'if I detain your reverence a few minutes even against your will. I do assure you, on the honour of a gentleman, that I ask not the question out of mere curiosity. I repeat it then. If you discovered that Alberoni had decided on depriving you of the direction of the king's conscience, on whose promises would you place the most implicit reliance—on those of the Regent or the Cardinal?'

The Jesuit paced up and down the room for some minutes, apparently uncertain what to say or do. Extravagant as the idea first suggested by Clifford appeared to him, there was something in the manner and the obstinacy with which it had been renewed that, in spite of himself, filled him with alarm, and the working of the muscles of his face, notwithstanding his best efforts at control, revealed to the keen eyes watching him the struggle within. For some minutes he continued to pace the room; suddenly he stopped in front of Clifford, and again addressed him; but it was not in the silky tone which he had hitherto affected, but in the voice and the manner of a man of the world.

'Young sir,' said he, 'you have been sent on a difficult and a dangerous enterprise; and the difficulty and danger of the mission are the best assurance of the discretion of him who has been entrusted with it. You ask me for my private thoughts; but confidence demands confidence, and you must lead the way. By your language, one would hold you to be as true a Castilian as ever was born at Toledo; yet something whispers to me that you are no

Spaniard. Are you not the caballero who was arrested the other day at the house of the grand chamberlain?' Clifford nodded.

'You supped that night with the Cardinal, were sent to Segovia,

and made your escape three days by-gone?'

The envoy laughed outright. 'Your reverence,' said he, 'has told

me all my history.'

'Not all,' said the Jesuit, with a malicious smile, 'but enough to show you that I have my secret police as well as Alberoni. And now,' continued he, 'as you have answered my question, I will answer yours. Did I believe for a moment that Alberoni dreamt of depriving me of my office, I would hold the intention as evidence of his hostility, and devote myself heart and soul to the wishes of the regent. And I speak this the more frankly, as I cannot deem the Parmesan mad enough for such folly.'

Clifford smiled. Does your reverence know the handwriting of

the Cardinal?" 'Well.'

'Did you ever hear of a certain priest called Benedict Di Castro?'
'The drunken canon of St. Jago, who spends half his time in the

wine-shops?

'Speak more respectfully of your successor,' said Clifford, 'and acknowledge the mandate of his master.' And he handed to the Jesuit, as he spoke, the letter which had been exhibited so triumphantly to the eyes of Donna Violante.

D'Aubenton snatched it from his fingers and read it with trembling eagerness. 'Where got you this, young man?' cried he, in a

voice of thunder.

Clifford detailed the scene at the Palace of Escalona—the drunkenness of the priest, the doubts of the duenna, the vainglorious boasting, and its consequences.

And now, added he, 'does your reverence still doubt?'

'Doubt!' repeated D'Aubenton, as he crushed the paper in his hands, and with a face convulsed with passion, paced the room with rapid steps; 'I doubt no longer. Madman! fool! idiot! that I was, ever to believe—to suppose for a moment that there could be true faith in an Italian!—to dream that he who deceived me once would not deceive me again! And I was to have been his tool, his dupe, his bauble! to be put off, or kept on, as suited his whim; and all, that in the end I might resign my place to a drunken vagabond—the parasite of the parasite of Vendôme. No, no, Julio Alberoni,' continued he, stopping suddenly and clenching his hand, as if he were addressing personally the object of his thoughts, 'I warned you if you sought to deceive me again, the treachery should prove your ruin, and Claude D'Aubenton will keep his word.'

Suddenly it appeared as if he recollected that there was present a spectator of his violence; for all at once, as if by the exertion of some strong internal power, his manner became calm, his face resumed its ordinary expression, and in cold low tones, which contrasted painfully with the excited violence of the voice which had preceded them, he said, 'Colonel Clifford, I accept the offers of the

regent, and will do my best to second his wishes. It will not be my fault if, before a week is over, Alberoni be not a fugitive. But it is idle to continue this discussion to-night. Give me your address, and from time to time I will communicate to you my intentions and their result; and now to bed. There is much to be done, and in such cases there is no such counsellor to a man as his pillow.'

And the new-made allies once more resumed their disguise. They parted at the door, and Clifford took his way to the Calle de la Cabeza.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## A KING AND HIS CONFESSOR.

It was on the morning after the conference narrated in the last chapter that D'Aubenton, according to the duties of his office, entered the king's chamber. The religious ceremonial in which he had taken a part seemed to have had a beneficial influence upon its royal occupant, for he had to a certain degree lost his usual listless melancholy; and instead of being sunk, as for the most part, in the cushions of his easy chair, he was on foot, and employed in studying with earnest attention that masterpiece of Titian which has already been alluded to, and which represented, in the character of Venus, the Princess of Eboli.

A change too had come over the Jesuit, but it was of a less pleasing character. Twelve hours had scarcely passed since his interview with Clifford, and yet they had done upon him the work of years. To think that he, one of the most astute of an order of priesthood, celebrated beyond all others for reading men's characters aright, and judging with singular accuracy of their policy and truthfulness in their professions, should have been gulled by one whom he considered so infinitely his inferior in the mind's more subtle intelligences, was to the proud priest to the last degree galling. The feeling of mortification had been but the antecedent of the feeling of revenge, and he had spent the live-long night in devising plans for making retribution as complete as possible.

He was too much agitated, however, to be able to shape out any plan which satisfied himself as calculated to effect the desired object; and he entered the king's chamber at his customary hour with every idea vague and undecided, except the hope of future vengeance. To further its attainment, it was clear that the king's humour, for the moment, must be gratified; and it was therefore in a more amiable voice than ordinary that he accosted his royal penitent.

'Allow me, Sire,' said he, as he approached Philip and addressed him in his most insinuating tones, 'to congratulate your Majesty on the favourable change which has taken place in your health and spirits.'

'Yes,' said his companion, with a laugh; 'I scarcely know why, but it seems as if the Funcion of the church of Atocha had renewed

my youth. I feel as I have not felt for years; and the recollections of my boyhood—its hopes, its wishes, its happiness—the old enjoyment of existence when existence was worth enjoying, have each in

turn come over my memory.'

'I guessed as much,' said the priest; 'and it needs no prophet to discover with whom those hopes, and wishes, and happiness were associated.' He looked as he spoke on the portrait which had been the subject of the king's studies, and added, 'You thought of the Princess of Ursins!'

'You are right, D'Aubenton. I thought of her who gave me that

picture—of Anne de la Trémouille.'

'The best, the most devoted of friends; to whose counsel and

firmness your Majesty is, in fact, indebted for your throne.'

'How charming a creature she was,' said Philip, 'when I knew her first! How lovely! I doubt,' continued he, pointing to the Titian on the wall, 'if even she—the belle des belles—the wife of Ruy Gomez were half as beautiful!'

'Yes,' continued the confessor, 'the princess was about thirty when your Majesty was selected to fill the Spanish throne; and, boy as you then were, you must have been a stock, a stone, an anchorite, had you not seen that a more perfect being never walked upon earth. Your Majesty spoke of her beauty, but of mere beauty we churchmen take no note; yet even that, brilliant as it might have been, was forgotten amid the blaze of her thousand fascinations, her grace, her talents, her mind. Ah, Sire, how she loved you!'

'She did—she did!' said Philip, clasping his hands passionately.

'And how she was requited!'

Philip grew pale as death; and, as if from inability to support himself, leant against a chair. 'D'Aubenton!' said he, in a low, faint voice, which had nevertheless in it something of reproach.

'Sire!' You are cruel,' continued the king, in faltering accents. 'In what?' said the Jesuit; 'I spoke of a disgraceful outrage—of an act which will to the day of doom dishonour the name of Alberoni.'

'You are right, D'Aubenton,' said Philip, speaking hurriedly, as if conscience endeavoured to lull her voice by transferring the guilt to another; 'it was not I—it was Alberoni.'

'Alberoni, the prime minister of Spain?'

There was something like sarcasm in the accents of the priest's voice; for again the king hastened to defend himself.

'Yes—the prime minister of Spain. He is, you know, from Parma—a countryman of the queen. It is her doing, and not mine.'

'Your grandfather, of glorious memory, was not in the habit of leaving to his wife the selection of his ministers.'

'True, true; but our honoured grandame, Maria Teresa, took no

interest in state affairs.'

'Yet who was better entitled to interfere? She was the sister of a mighty monarch. She was eventually the heiress of a great kingdom. She was her husband's equal.'

'True—true,' said Philip, as if he would have avoided the continuance of the subject; but the confessor was not to be so easily

moved from his purpose.

'Whereas your Majesty,' said he, 'shared your crown with the niece of a paltry Italian prince. She might have been satisfied with the honour of being a queen, without claiming besides the right of ruling a kingdom.'

'And yet,' said Philip, ever tenacious of respect to Elizabeth Farnese, 'the choice was no bad one; for the Cardinal is a great

statesman.'

'In what, Sire, saving in the greatness of his misfortunes? When he first received the reins of power, he found your Majesty at peace, and he involved you in war with half the dynasties of Europe.'

'He conquered Sardinia,' said the king, timidly. 'You have

lost it.'

'He equipped a powerful fleet.' 'The English destroyed it at

Girgenti.

He created a rebellion in France.' Only to see it crushed, and some half-dozen Breton nobles, whom he had seduced from their

allegiance, perish on the scaffold.'

'Well,' said Philip, in a tone which marked his irritation, 'events have occasionally gone cross even with the greatest men; but you will acknowledge at least the vastness of his mind—the grandeur of his plans.' 'Pardon me, Sire, if I refuse to acknowledge either. The excellence of a tree must be known by its fruit; and I cannot admire plans which not only want success, but appear to bring calamity upon every person connected with them. At his suggestion, the Duke of Ormond equipped a fleet to bear aid to the Jacobites in England. It was dispersed at sea. At his suggestion, Charles XII., of Sweden, consented to support their cause; and the result of the unhappy alliance was his assassination at Frederickshall. No, Sire, the Cardinal is unfortunate, and more than unfortunate, for his aid seems to insure positive calamity.'

The facts recapitulated by the Jesuit were undeniable, whatever might have been the accuracy of the deduction from them; and they seemed to bring back the shadows, which for the most part rested upon the spirit of Philip, as on that of the king of Israel. Insensibly his manner lost its new-found elation, and his eye its brightness; and with hesitating step, he once more made his way

to his chair.

'It is too true, D'Aubenton,' said he. 'It is but too true! The calamities you have spoken of have followed each other in a manner which would appal the strongest heart. Would to heaven,' muttered he to himself, 'I could guess their cause!' 'Your prayers are answered, Sire. I am a priest; and it is given to me, as to Daniel of old, to interpret what is hidden from eyes less holy. The man is evil; and heaven expresses its anger at his acts by sending misfortune upon those who employ him.'

Philip was superstitious, and the idea of divine wrath appalled him.

'And in what,' said he, in hesitating accents, 'has he sinned?'

'In much. He would send to the scaffold one of your oldest and

most faithful servants, the grand chamberlain,'

'Yet the policy, if a harsh, is a sound one. Pacheco is a grandee, and the power of the great nobles has ever been injurious to the state.' 'Ha! the axiom smacks of the Cardinal. How proved he that?'

'Tarquin knocked off the heads of the tallest poppies to win Gabii.' 'He did well: Gabii was not his own; and he suggested shedding the blood of his enemies. Pardon me for saying that it is your own subjects whom your Majesty is bringing to the block.'

'And yet no one doubts Richelieu's talents; and Alberoni averred

that Richelieu adopted the same policy.'

'Did the Cardinal add that it applied to the king as well as to his subjects? Did he inform your Majesty that if the French nobles were the victims of the minister of Louis XIII., the French monarch

was his slave?' 'No, no, no; he said nothing of that.'

'Did he inform you, Sire, that it was only by the permission of this Mayor of the Palace, that the King of France engaged or dismissed a servant? Did he say that the amusements, the expenses, the employments of this king and no king, were all regulated by his minister?—that he fixed even his hunting-days, and only once in nine years permitted him to see his wife?' 'Monstrous!' exclaimed Philip, 'monstrous, if it were not incredible.'

The king was the most uxorious of men, and the last blow had

evidently told.

The Jesuit saw his advantage, and followed it up eagerly.

'Worst of all, your Majesty, he has done his best to break up the ties of family affection, by producing dissension between you and the Regent of France, your cousin, the Duke of Orleans.'

'Name him not,' said Philip, springing to his feet as if affected

by a sudden spasm. 'I hate, I detest, I loathe him!'

'It grieves me, Sire, to see in you a spirit so uncharitable. Is this Christianity? Is this religion?' 'It is both, D'Aubenton,' continued the king, as he approached his confessor, and addressed him in a voice which bespoke the most intense horror. 'You think that my enmity to him is the result of disappointed worldly interest. You are wrong. I am a man, and I confess I love him not, for his long-continued and often-proved enmity. But I detest him, not for that, but because—because—' and the king paused for a minute, and then in accents of horror, whispered in his confessor's ear, 'because he is a Jansenist.'

'You are misinformed, Sire,' said the Jesuit, coldly. 'You have

been grossly deceived. The regent is only an atheist.

'Are you sure of that?' said Philip, anxiously. 'Perfectly sure of it.'

'Ah!' And the king took along breath, as if his mind had been relieved of a fearful load.

'You see,' said D'Aubenton, 'that is quite a different thing.'

'Oh, quite different!'

'An atheist, your Majesty, is merely a person who believes nothing. His perdition is assured no doubt. But that is his affair. No one else is the worse for it. But a Jansenist, Sire—' and the Jesuit looked grave, and shook his head.

The king carefully modelled his demeanour upon that of his

spiritual director.

'A Jansenist, Sire, is a very different person. He does more than disbelieve, he acts. An atheist is satisfied with infidelity, and rests. He does the Church no injury. A Jansenist, on the contrary, is her zealous and constant enemy. He disputes her doctrines, denies her traditions, and disclaims her rights and her power.'

Once more the Jesuit shook his head, and the royal periwig

recommenced its oscillations.

'He rejects,' said D'Aubenton, 'the celibacy of the clergy.'

'Dreadful!

' He doubts the power of the Church to give absolution.'

'Monstrous!'

'He denies the supremacy of the Pope.' 'Horrible!' said Philip, clasping his hands, and looking up to heaven, as if in astonishment that it could for a moment tolerate such wickedness.

'Your Majesty sees, then, that you have been misinformed.'

'Oh, entirely.

'That your cousin is a mere esprit fort.' 'Nothing more.'

'He has to be sure some silly notions, but, notwithstanding; is an excellent man.' 'Oh, I do not doubt it. Now that I know that he is not a Jansenist, I can overlook trifles. The duke may have some small weaknesses, but, in other respects, I believe him to be a worthy—nay, as you say, an excellent man.'

'And yet between your Majesty and this amiable prince of your

house, the Cardinal has ever attempted to sow dissension.'

'True—true—true. A constant embroiler. A thorough spirit of evil.'

'Your Majesty speaks well,' continued the priest. 'The whole career of the Cardinal has been one of crime, and it is of your Majesty that heaven has hitherto exacted the price. Your Majesty knows of his unjust and unnecessary wars, but you scarcely know the impiety by which they have been supported. About eight months ago you sent a large fleet to sea. How was it equipped? You will scarcely believe it, Sire—at the expense of religion. For his godless ends, the Cardinal, by forced contributions, raised half a million of ducats from the monasteries, and compelled those who devote themselves to prayer, to provide funds for the unholy purposes of war.' 'Sacrilege!' gasped forth Philip. 'Positive sacrilege!'

'And what was the result? Precisely what might have been expected. The fleet was destroyed by the English off the coast of Sicily.' 'True, true,' said the king, clasping his hands in despair,

'a double dispensation. Vanquished, and by heretics; I see the crime and its punishment.'

'There are others of a deeper dye. Your Majesty little suspects it, but I have a tale to disclose to your royal ear which will harrow your feelings. The Cardinal has formed a league with the Turks.'

'Incredible! With the followers of the impostor of Mecca? with Mahoun?' 'Yes; with Mahoun. A Catholic king, nay more, the Catholic king, leagued in alliance with the oppressors of the Holy City; with those, by fighting against whom, St. Louis, the greatest, the most pious of your name, won for himself a blessed salvation, and immortality.'

The blow was too much for endurance. The royal bigot sank down in his chair and remained for some time silent, as if paralysed

by the nature of the communication.

'And yet,' said he, after a while, 'if Alberoni has sinned, it may have been for the advancement of my interests; and though I may not approve, it is scarcely just that I, for whose benefit it was in-

tended, should denounce the act.' 'Sire, it is a duty.'

'And yet—' began the reluctant monarch. 'Sire,' continued D'Aubenton, 'it concerns me much to see your Majesty so hardened in evil. But if you will not discharge your duties, I will, at least, discharge mine. We of the priesthood are permitted to grant absolution, but it is only to those who sorrow for their offences. Forgive me, Sire, for saying that where there is no repentance for sin, it is impossible for me to absolve the sinner.'

'Oh! father, holy father,' said the king, falling upon his knees, 'recall those words. Much as I love this man, I would not for him peril my soul. Recall them, I say, and I will do everything which duty, which religion requires.' 'Heaven is merciful,' said the Jesuit, 'and I am its minister. I will recall them, but on con-

ditions.'

'Oh, only name them,' said the royal penitent, eagerly, 'and I am willing to fulfil them.' 'But now—this instant—this very moment.'

'I repeat that I am ready.' 'It is well.' With the words, the priest sat himself down to a table, and wrote some two or three lines upon a sheet of paper near him. When he had finished, he handed it to the king, and said: 'Your Majesty will copy that, and authenticate it with your signature.'

Philip took the paper, cast his eyes hurriedly over the words

scrawled by his confessor, and became deadly pale.

'It is too cruel,' said he. 'You will not insist on a sacrifice like this?' 'Ha! you hesitate!' said D'Aubenton, in a voice of thunder. 'You hesitate! Your professions, then, were false, your repentance a mockery.'

The king made no reply. Probably from the agitation of his feelings he was unable to articulate. His very limbs seemed to lose their power, for he staggered to the chair, and sinking down in it,

covered his face with his hands.

With a keen eye the Jesuit watched the movements of his penitent. For a moment his features were the expression of intense

contempt. Gradually they assumed a loftier character.

'Sinful man!' said he, in a tone of admonition, 'has it come to this? You have promised, and have broken your promise. You have spoken of repentance, but have felt it not. You have lied not unto me, but unto God; and thus I, His minister, pronounce your doom.'

He raised his arms aloft as he spoke, and drew up his person to his full height, in the attitude of one about to pronounce a malediction. But the words were never permitted to leave his lips, for Philip started to his feet, as if nerved into momentary strength by agony, and exclaimed with a half-shriek;

'No, no, father, curse me not. I will do all that you require of

me; therefore curse me not.'

He staggered to the table, and proceeded to copy the lines which had been traced by his confessor. When the task was completed, the Jesuit carefully perused the royal document. Apparently it was satisfactory, for he folded it up, and, with a slight smile, put it in his pocket.

'Ît is well, my son,' continued he, turning to his penitent. 'Heaven is merciful, and forgives. And now I will bid you farewell. And yet, ere I go, I will once more raise my hands not to curse you,

but to bless. Mi fili, benedico te!'

He left the room as he spoke. Philip gazed after him with an

agonized eye.

He has blessed me,' muttered he to himself, 'but will Heaven bless me? It were sacrilege to doubt it. Yet that man, that Alberoni, had served me faithfully, and I abandon him. God help me! My brain reels under the pressure of these constant doubts, and this crown of Spain, so dishonestly won, and dishonestly worn, will in the end work out its own judgment, and drive its unhappy wearer to idiocy or the grave.'

And the poor king, exhausted in mind and body, once more sank back in his chair, and abandoned himself to a paroxysm of uncon-

trollable sorrow.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

#### RETRIBUTION.

WE must change the scene to another room in the palace—that of the Cardinal-minister. It was the fourth of December, and about five in the afternoon. The early shadows of a winter's night were already throwing themselves across the apartment, but their approach was unheeded by its solitary inmate. By the side of the brazier in the centre sat Alberoni. He was in thought: his meditations seemed agreeable, for ever and anon a smile of triumph lightened up for an instant his usually somewhat heavy features.

'Thanks to the gods!' said he at length, in soliloquy, 'the crisis of my fate is past, and the fortunes of Julio Alberoni are once more in the ascendant. It was a bold venture, that imprisonment of the Pacheco. I had feared remonstrances from the grandees, doubts from the king, anger from the queen; but my alarms, it seems, were unnecessary, for all has passed off well. It is scarcely two hours since I saw Philip. Never have I known him so gracious. And he has gone to hunt at the Pardo. Well, I too have my game to run down, and mine is the nobler prey. But two days more, and there comes on the trial of the grand chamberlain. I have already communicated with his judges, and decreed his fate. The axe shall do its work; and when the first of Spain's nobles has fallen before me, who will dare to contest my power?'

A gentle rap at the door interrupted the current of his self-

congratulations.

'Ha! Who comes here?' said the proud priest, in a tone of sudden anger; 'and when I had given orders not to be disturbed. Woe be to the intruder!'

As he spoke he gave permission to enter. The door was timidly opened, and the usher in faltering accents announced that Father D'Aubenton, the confessor of the king, desired an audience of the

prime minister...

'And how is it,' said Alberoni, his eyes flashing fire, 'that you have dared to forget my orders? Why did you not tell him I would be alone?' 'I did—I did, your Eminence,' stammered out the terrified attendant. 'But the reverend father would not be controlled, and insisted on my repeating his wishes to your Eminence.'

'Ha! is he so froward then?' muttered the Cardinal. 'Well, sirrah,' continued he, turning to the domestic, 'let the priest have his will; but ere you introduce him bring lights. It may be as well,' said he to himself, 'to see this man's face, for one can learn nothing from his tongue. He comes no doubt for his own ends; he shall remain for mine. He has chosen to beard the lion in his den, and, by God's truth, I will make him remember the interview. When the king returns he will find some changes in his household—Grand Chamberlain and Confessor both gone at a blow! It is a coup-d'état worthy of Richelieu. But here come the lights and the man.'

As he spoke some large wax-tapers were put upon the table, and their appearance was immediately followed by that of D'Aubenton.

The bearing of the confessor was more humble than usual, his manner more insinuating, his smile more bland; and he advanced towards the prime minister with the air of a dependent, who is conscious he is intruding, and who endeavours to disarm, by the humility of his look, the reproaches which he feels he has deserved.

'A thousand pardons, your Eminence,' said he, 'for encroaching on your valuable time, but my reasons for seeing you were so weighty, that my anxiety has, I fear, got the better of my politeness.'

Alberoni had risen as the Jesuit approached, and without asking his visitor to take a seat remained himself standing, as if to intimate that their interview would be short. If any doubts remained upon

the subject, his first words would have removed them.

'My time, father,' continued he, in a tone of irritation, 'whether valuable or not, is at least much occupied, and I would wish to be alone. But it matters little: what is your business?' 'I understand, your Eminence, that a fast-sailing brigantine is about to leave Alicante for Civita Vecchia. Its passage will probably be a rapid one, and it returns immediately.'

'It may be so,' said the minister, coldly. 'But in what am I interested in this? I am no merchant, and have no venture to put

on board.

'Your Eminence might have, and I trust may have; for it is on that point I would speak with you. You did me the honour to promise me that you would recommend me to the Holy See. May I ask if you have done so?' 'At present,' said Alberoni, in a tone of indifference, 'such application is impossible, as the Emperor will permit no couriers of Spain or of the Pope to pass through northern Italy.'

'Exactly. I guessed that such was the reason of your Eminence's delay, and therefore it is that on learning the approaching departure of the brigantine, I came hither to express the hope that you would embrace this for me most happy opportunity, and send a courier to his Holiness the bearer of your kind wishes towards your

servant.'

'It is impossible at present,' said Alberoni, bluntly. 'The king's

couriers are otherwise employed.'

'And when,' said D'Aubenten, in a timid tone, 'may I venture to hope that you will solicit in my favour?' 'That must depend upon what policy may demand for the interest of my master.'

'Not at present then?' 'Certainly not.'

'But in a month perhaps?' 'Impossible to say.'

'But within a year, at least?' said the Jesuit, in a voice of the most fawning submission. 'You will promise it positively within a year?' 'I will promise nothing!' said Alberoni losing his temper. 'Nor, permit me to add, Father D'Aubenton, will I allow even you to address to me, upon an ungrateful subject, such repeated interrogatories.'

'Yet you gave me a solemn pledge once.'

'If I did, I recall it. I have changed my mind.'

'Yet you did me the honour to say, that as confessor to his Majesty, I might be of service to the government even of so dis-

tinguished a statesman as the Cardinal-minister.'

'Ho, ho, ho!' said Alberoni, with an insulting laugh. 'I understand the language of the disciples of Loyola! There is a menace in your honeyed words. You would threaten me with the withdrawal of your protection.'

D'Aubenton gave a quiet smile.

'Ay, ay!' said Alberoni, as his quick eye noted the expression of the Jesuit. 'I understand those omens of the future; but the time has gone by when I heeded them. The high and mighty prince, the grandee Duke of Escalona, whom you intended to have made minister in my place, as the price of your red stockings, dies in eight-and-forty hours on the scaffold; and you,' he continued, with a sneer, 'you may go and give him absolution, for the king has no further need of your services.'

'Yet,' said D'Aubenton, meekly, 'I am his Majesty's confessor.

Alberoni approached the table, seized one of the printed forms which lay upon it, filled it up with some half-dozen words, added his

signature, and rang the hand-bell.

'Your reverence, said he, addressing the Jesuit, 'is in error. You were the confessor of his Majesty, but you are so no longer. The office has been transferred to a worthier man. Here,' continued he, turning to the attendant, carry this to the Marquis of Tolosa, and tell him to register it immediately. It is the warrant which appoints the priest, Benedict Di Castro, Canon of St. Jago, to the office of confessor to his Majesty Philip V'

'And give my respects too,' said D'Aubenton, in a humble tone, 'to Don Fernando Duran, and tell him that, when the warrant is ready, I shall feel grateful by his informing me, as I would not wish to remain any longer beneath a roof where I should be an intruder.'

The usher departed, and the rivals were once more alone. In Alberoni's countenance there was something like astonishment. It might be, that after the frank avowal of his hostility, he had expected his companion to withdraw. It might be that he had anticipated a storm of reproaches, and had found only humble resignation. Whatever was the feeling, the Jesuit either did not or affected not to remark it, but sinking down in an arm-chair, he bent his head to his knees, as if borne down by the pressure of some overwhelming internal sorrow.

Some five minutes had thus elapsed, and still the silence of death was in the chamber. D'Aubenton stirred not, and Alberoni remained gazing at him, as if, like a bird fascinated by a snake, he had

been unable to withdraw his eyes.

At length the usher reappeared. It was to announce from the

Marquis of Tolosa that the warrant was ready.

The words seemed to dispel the momentary paralysis of the Jesuit, and he rose from his chair, but the manner and the man had changed. No longer stooping, humble, and timid, he seemed to have assumed the embodiment of a new form. His person was drawn up to its full height, his eyes flashed, his lip curled, his whole expression that of an avenging angel about to announce to the evil their doom.

'Julio Alberoni,' said he, as he advanced with a slow and haughty step towards the astonished minister, 'I come to bid you farewell. For five long years have I been your companion in this kingdom and in this house. By my influence you partly rose to power. By

my influence have you been mainly supported in it, and how have I been repaid? You assured me of honours to which my rank, my mind, my services gave me a just title, and you failed me. Again, a second time, when you found my support necessary to your existence, you renewed the pledge, and a second time you have broken it. Well, if you have been false to your promises, I will be true to mine. In this room, on this spot, three weeks ago, I warned you, that if you again deceived me the treachery should prove your ruin; and now I keep my word.'

He clapped his hands as he spoke. The door instantly opened, and an officer, at the head of some dozen soldiers of the royal guard,

entered the room.

'Amenzaga,' said the Jesuit to their leader, for the Cardinal was still speechless from astonishment, 'arrest that man for treason.'

'And by what warrant?' said Alberoni, haughtily, for his high

spirit had returned to him.

'By this,' returned the Jesuit, drawing a paper from his bosom. 'It is in the handwriting of his Majesty, and the signature of the king is attested by that of the under secretary of state, the Marquis of Tolosa.'

'But there must be some mistake here,' said Alberoni. 'My gra-

cious master must have been in error. I must see the king.

'The twig is well limed,' said the Jesuit, coldly; 'but the snare was foreseen, and was prepared against. His Majesty has gone to the l'ardo.'

'But surely,' said the hapless minister, clinging in his agony like a drowning man to a straw, 'time will be given me for explanations.'

'Time—to you!' said the confessor, in a tone of bitter mockery.

'Did you give time to Anne de la Trémouille?'

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the Cardinal staggered as if from a heavy blow, and sinking down in a chair pressed his hand to his forehead, muttering to himself, in a low voice:

'It is the judgment of God! I have sinned, and the retribution

is just.'

But his attendants paid little respect to his sufferings or his penitence. A sedan-chair, which had apparently been brought to the gallery on purpose, was introduced into the room. The minister was placed within it, and carried down stairs. There was no resistance. From the moment of the mention of the name of his ancient patroness, Alberoni seemed paralyzed, and submitted listlessly, and it might be unconsciously, to the acts of his attendants. At the door below stood a carriage in waiting, surrounded by a body of light cavalry. The prisoner was placed within, Amenzaga took the seat by his side, and in a few minutes the late redoubted minister of Spain had left, and for ever, the scene of his short-lived greatness.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## AN OLD WOMAN'S GRATITUDE.

Ir was about two hours after the events which we have related that Clifford was seated in his room in the Calle de la Cabeza. He was in deep anxiety. Since his conference with D'Aubenton, he had heard nothing of the doings of the Jesuit. Of the determination of the priest to accomplish what he had undertaken, he entertained no doubts. He was too well acquainted with the energy of the man, with his selfish nature, with his vindictive spirit. The absence of intelligence, too, proved no absence of action, for he knew the secresy which ever marked the movements of the disciples of Loyola. Yet how far had the confessor advanced? Had he spoken to the king of Alberoni? Had he succeeded in obtaining the order for his removal? or, if obtained would it be obeyed? Such were some of the thoughts which chased each other in turn across the brain of the young envoy, and each threw a fresh shadow over his brow as it passed; for how much depended upon the result!—the success of his diplomacy, the triumph of his love, the life of his new-found relative. Exhausted at length by the agitating character of his reflections, he sat in his room moody and silent.

All at once a bell was heard at the outer door. The cautious landlord, as was his wont, answered it in person, and immediately after entered the room. He placed a letter on the table and retired. With palpitating heart did Clifford examine the missive. It was addressed, like those of Therese, 'To the Senor Zuniga,' but the handwriting was unknown to him. He opened it. The contents were comprised in a single line: 'Vicit Leo ex tribu Judæ.'

Clifford sprang to his feet. It was the signal agreed upon between him and D'Aubenton; the private motto of the Jesuits, which they had borrowed from the Templars, and which typified so well the ambition and the power of the military monks, and their still more aspiring successors.

'What!' said the young soldier to himself, 'can I believe my eyes? Is the great event really over? And how has it been accomplished? What says D'Aubenton?'

plished? What says D'Aubenton?

And again he betook himself to the letter, but he sought in vain for further information in its pages. Too anxious to remain in doubt he snatched up his cloak and hat, and hurried to the palace. As he passed through the Puerta del Sol he observed in every quarter anxious groups collected, discussing in low muttered tones some apparently important intelligence. He waited not to mix with them, but with accelerated steps hastened towards the royal residence.

As he approached it, he observed, collected round a side-door, a somewhat larger number of loungers than ordinary, and thither he made his way. He had no difficulty in recognising the portal—it was the same by which he had made his exit on the night of his journey to Segovia, and it was that too which had so lately wit-

nessed the departure of the Cardinal. In front, stood two or three of the royal domestics, who, in low tones and with many an interjection of terror and astonishment, were detailing to their gossips, who had congregated from every part of Madrid, the astounding news. Clifford mingled with the crowd, and from the narrative, intended for other ears, learned the full success of the plot.

The Jesuit had triumphed then, and the great minister of Spain had fallen. His ruin had been the object of Clifford's mission and his warmest aspirations; and yet now that the Colossus was in the dust—such are the inconsistencies of human nature—the tale of ruin was listened to with a sigh. The unquestioned talents of the Cardinal, his energy, his ambition—the mind which had raised him from the lowest dregs of society, and placed him on a level with its greatest princes—had often excited, and long before they met, Clifford's admiration.

His genial manners, too, at the supper-table, his flattering offers of advancement, and, even after their rejection, his generosity (for Clifford could not help confessing to himself, that when death might have been justly awarded to the agent of a private enterprise, mere confinement in a royal castle was generosity), all had aided to create in his bosom a liking for the man. It was therefore with something of a feeling of choking in the throat that he left the palace, and turned his steps towards the residence of the grand chamberlain.

He no longer, however, sought the garden-door—all danger from recognition was over. He made his way direct to the great gate, and asked for José. The old man answered the summons at once, though his eye expressed somewhat like astonishment on seeing Clifford. His cautious, self-possessed temperament, however, gave no utterance to his feelings in words; and with the air of one who had never before seen the visitor, he received his instructions. They were simply to the effect that Don Carlos Zuniga requested an interview with Donna Teresa Pacheco.

It is needless to tell our fair readers that the boon was instantly conceded; and in another minute the lovers were in each other's arms.

'Oh, Charles!' said the blushing girl, as she gently withdrew herself from Clifford's embrace, 'you here—and by the great gate! What folly!—what madness!—what danger!' 'None, love,' said her companion. 'The danger is past—the Cardinal has fallen.'

'Impossible—incredible!' said she. 'And you smile! Ah, cruel!' continued Therese, as the tears started to her eyes; 'is this a subject for mockery?' 'By heavens, love!' said her companion, as he passed his arms tenderly round her, 'I speak the truth. Our great enemy has gone!'

'And whither?' 'To Pampeluna—to France—never to return.'

'And my dear grandfather then is free?' 'Not yet, love; but he will probably be so to-morrow. In the mean time, however, his life is safe.'

'And you, Charles—dear Charles, you have done all this! What does not he—what do not we all owe you? Ah, how can we ever

repay you?'

Clifford took her hand, and whispered something in her ear. What the words were is not upon record; but they must have been eloquent, for Therese cast down her eyes, and blushed and smiled, and was comforted.

For two long hours did the lovers interchange their congratulations on the past, and their hopes and fears for the future. Then were discussed the pride of the old noble, his strong prejudices in favour of Castilian blood, his affection for his grandchild, his passionate love for his mother's family, his probable gratitude to his preserver. Each topic was canvassed in its turn; but apparently their prospects of happiness did not brighten as they analysed them, for insensibly the faces of both saddened, and tears stood in Therese's eyes. At length, the great clock of St. Isidro chimed the hour of eight. It seemed to recall to Clifford's recollection that he had other duties to perform, for he started to his feet. Once more the hands touched each other, the lips met in one long, sad embrace, and, in another minute, Therese was alone.

The envoy had returned to his solitary quarters. As soon as he arrived there, he proceeded to devote himself to that duty which, had he been a perfect diplomatist, should have been first attended to—he wrote to Lord Stanhope and Dubois an account of the successful issue of his mission. He added, that if his conduct had given satisfaction to his superiors, he should feel grateful for a six months' leave of absence, as he had found relatives in Madrid, and was anxious to spend some time in their society. This done, he betook himself to his couch, and, for the first time for many a long night, enjoyed undisturbed repose.

At an early hour on the following morning, the king and queen returned from the Pardo. The country was without a government, and it was necessary to find, and at once, a successor to the displaced minister. Elizabeth Farnese, anxious to obey literally the wishes of the allies, selected for the office a subject of Spain, the Marquis Grimaldi; and as such an administration could only exist by the general support of the grandees, orders were immediately given for the liberation of the Duke of Escalona from his captivity; and Clifford was selected for the pleasing duty of announcing to

him his freedom.

For this he was indebted to the good offices of the Assa Feta. Laura Pescatori was to the last degree susceptible. Ever thinking of love herself, she had the most entire sympathy for others in affairs of the heart. With a woman's quickness of perception, she had at once divined the affection which existed between Clifford and Therese, and she determined to lend her aid to its happy dénouement. She would, probably, from the kindly eye with which she looked upon all flirtations, have done so under any circumstances that chanced to bring one under her notice, but upon the

present occasion her energies in the cause of Cupid were increased twenty-fold by the sudden liking which she had formed for the

young soldier.

Clifford had preserved her pearl necklace and her life, and for both benefits Laura was not ungrateful, for she was attached to existence, and adored jewellery. But her preserver had a merit in her eyes, far beyond his skill as a swordsman; he was remarkably handsome; and the Assa Feta, who like Henry VIII. loved to look on a man, decided in her own mind that no position was too lofty for so excellent a specimen of humanity. She determined, therefore, to make his fortune. Of Donna Teresa's future prospects, as the first heiress in Spain she was well aware, but with the shrewdness of a woman of the world she doubted how far the affection of Therese, however impassioned it might be, would be considered by the haughty head of the house of Pacheco as a sufficient reason for giving his assent to the match. She had therefore employed her busy brain in a thousand devices, as to the means of making the old noble the debtor of the youth who was the aspirant to his grandchild. Her suspicions and her wishes had been freely communicated to her royal mistress, and Elizabeth Farnese had entered nothing loth into the plans of her attendant.

In fact, the queen, for her own sake, gladly listened to suggestions which tallied so exactly with her private interests. The Cardinal had fallen, and the price had been paid to the allies for the promised principality. But there was an old adage, 'the cup and the lip.' Much might still interfere between the guarantee of the appanage to Don Carlos, and its possession. France and England might hesitate. might be treacherous, might refuse. It was important, therefore, to her to secure in favour of her plans the zealous co-operation of their representative. If she gratified Colonel Clifford, it was natural to suppose that he would do his best to gratify her; and how could his services be better repaid than by a marriage with the wealthiest match in Spain? If the suspicions of her nurse were correct, the lady's wishes on the subject could scarcely be doubted; those of the gentleman were undeniable; the only difficulty to be apprehended would arise from the grand chamberlain. But the duke was in captivity. His enemy had, it is true, fallen; but the charge of treason, if a fact, was in no degree affected by the change of a prime minister. He might still be brought to trial for his life, and, as before, the opinion of the judges might go against him. It would be good policy then to make not merely his freedom, but his restoration to rank, honours, and position, a concession to the wishes of the representative of the allied powers.

Upon this thought the queen acted. Shortly after her return to the palace, on the morning of the sixth, Clifford was again summoned to an interview. With that fascinating manner which Elizabeth Farnese could so well command at pleasure, she informed him of the fall of the Cardinal, enlarged upon her anxiety to give immediate effect to the wishes of the allies, and requesting his aid

in obtaining the speedy investiture of Don Carlos in the duchies. This was at once frankly promised, and with the air of a man who intended to bear out his assertions.

'It is well, Colonel Clifford,' said the queen, in the tone of one who was content with her visitor; 'you have promised to do your best for the furtherance of my wishes; it is but fair that I, in my turn, should repay the obligation. I owe you a double debt for Donna Laura and myself. In what manner can I discharge it?'

Clifford was silent.

If you,' said the queen, smiling, 'will not even hint to me a mode of satisfying my obligations, I must be allowed, though it is but ill-guessing in the dark, to suggest one. Donna Laura tells me that she met you in the park of the Casa del Campo, in company with Donna Teresa Pacheco.' 'Your Majesty is right,' said Clifford, colouring deeply. 'Donna Teresa is my relative. My mother was a Zuniga.'

'Of what family?' said the queen, interrogatively.

'A daughter, madam, of the Duke of Beja.'

'Nothing could be more fortunate,' said the Queen; 'and what you tell me only gives strength to my original idea. You are aware that the grand chamberlain is at present in Segovia on a charge of high treason. I know not if it be well founded; but true or not, the king, my husband, estimates so highly the services he has received at your hands, that he is willing, should you demand it, to restore at your request, your relative to freedom and to his former rank and honours.'

'Ah, madam!' said Clifford, dropping on one knee, 'how well you read my thoughts! How shall I express my gratitude?' unnecessary: it is I who am still your debtor. I have to repay you for the protection which your gallantry afforded to Donna Laura. But of this,' continued she, with a smile, 'we will speak hereafter. In the mean time, the duke's pardon shall be made out, though with but slight allusion to the fact of your kind intercession in his favour. It may be as well,' she added, 'that he should not learn till we meet how much he really owes you. You know the pride of our aged friend; and the information from a fair lady's lips will be less galling than if blazoned on the pages of a state paper. But it will do no harm if you be the bearer of the joyful intelligence. In an hour, therefore, hold yourself in readiness at the apartments of the Marquis of Tolosa. You will there find the necessary documents complete, and a royal carriage to convey you to Segovia. Nay,' continued she, as Clifford would have spoken, 'you are entitled to the honour, for are you not in fact an ambassador? And now, have you aught else to ask of me?

'Madam,' said Clifford, colouring deeply, 'I have already taxed your Majesty's kindness too highly; but as you encourage me to pre-

fer a petition, I will make it?"

'And what is that?' 'You have granted freedom to one state

prisoner; may I solicit it for another?'

'And who may that be?' 'He is at your feet, madam: I too am the captive of your Majesty.'

The queen laughed, then coloured, and then shook her fan.

'It is well,' continued she, 'that Donna Teresa Pacheco did not hear what she might have misinterpreted. To speak seriously, I have been told of your adventures, and will do what I am sure the young lady will heartily approve—free you from your bondage to me. You will find the necessary papers for assuring your liberty, as well as the duke's, at Don Fernando Duran's. And now, I wish you a pleasant journey, and for the present bid you adieu.'

She extended her hand as she spoke; Clifford kissed the fair fingers respectfully, and with a profound obeisance, left the room.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

The shades of evening were falling fast, when, on the afternoon of the same day which had witnessed his interview with the queen, Clifford reached Segovia. As the carriage passed under the arched gateway which led to the court-yard, the traveller could not help contrasting the circumstances of his present visit with his last. Then a prisoner, his mission defeated, his love hopeless, how gloomy had been his anticipations of the future! Scarcely a month had since elapsed, and yet how many important events had been crowded within its limits. The prime minister of Spain, whose mere smile had given happiness, and whose word was law, was himself an exile; and he, the young aspirant to political distinctions, who had been sent at his bidding to swell the list of captives, was in his turn the court favourite and the cynosure of neighbouring eyes.

Even his love, in which there was still so much uncertain, presented brighter prospects. He had made the acquaintance of Therese's grandsire; nay more, he had been the fortunate means of preserving his wealth, his liberty, perhaps his life. Difficulties might no doubt arise; but still there was hope that the services he had rendered might soften the old man's prejudices. It was with a flushed cheek, therefore, and a throbbing heart, that Clifford made

his way to the chamber of the Duke of Escalona.

It is easy to imagine the joy of their meeting; and yet the grand chamberlain received the favourable intelligence with more calmness than might have been expected. To one so stout-hearted, the mere chances of death had brought but little terror. What presented themselves in more gloomy colours to his imagination were the loss of his rank, the attainder of his blood, and most of all the charge of disloyalty against a race proverbial for being loyal. Still, the many changes in his eventful life had taught him philosophy, and he bore his good as he had borne his evil-fortune, with the composure of a resolute and self-sustained nature.

Yet his visitor was not the less welcome. Many were the inquiries made with regard to the details of the plot which had terminated so happily—for it had been thought best, for fear of accidents, to risk no communication with the old noble—and many were the

questions asked with regard to his darling grandchild. The subject was pleasing to both parties, and on it Clifford spoke eloquently. He detailed in his happiest language the anxiety of Therese for her grandsire's safety; their meetings at the Palace of Escalona, and the Casa del Campo; the death of Perez and Ambrosio; his fruitless interview with the queen; the drunkenness of Di Castro; the fortunate seizure of the pocket-book; the indignation of the confessor; the result.

'All's well that ends well,' said the duke, as the story was completed. 'And so the Parmesan is gone at last. But for that, I fear me the house of l'acheco would have had a blot on its escutcheon; and to you, my boy, I owe it for having saved our hitherto spotless shield from such a calamity.'

Clifford would have disclaimed the honour paid him, and awarded it to Therese; but the grand chamberlain would not listen to him.

'No, no,' said he, 'the girl is a dear child, and loves her old grandfather well; and no doubt she aided your escape down the rock. But after all, she did but plan, it was you that executed; and where should I have been now, but for your interview with D'Aubenton and the queen, and most of all for your having liberated that old woman, the Assa Feta, from the clutches of the Pimental? Well, your diplomacy has not been amiss; but to say the truth, I have been a soldier half my life, and I would rather have seen that passage of arms with Don Ambrosio, than witnessed the no doubt dexterous manner in which you bamboozled the Jesuit and Elizabeth By my honour, lad, you must be a good swordsman; for the scoundrel hidalgo was a neighbour of ours of old, and he had the reputation of being as skilful with his weapon as any man in Spain. Well, to-morrow we shall go back to Madrid, and then I will give you better quarters than I have been able to afford you in this tumble down castle of King Alonzo; for it is a settled thing that you take up your residence with me at the palace of Escalona.

Clifford was silent.

'What lad!' continued the duke, 'you do not hesitate upon the subject? But you fear the formality of an old man's residence. Vaya. You shall have a barrack of your own, and come and go just as you please.'

Still Clifford made no answer. Yet it was evident that his mind was busy, for he looked agitated, and a sudden paleness came over

his features.

The grand chamberlain marked the change with alarm.

'What ails you, lad?' said he, hurriedly, 'are you ill? Speak.'

'Yes,' said Clifford, at length, with an effort, 'I will speak, and it is best that I should speak now. Before I knew your Excellency, even before I was acquainted with Donna Teresa's name or rank, I loved her, and I love her still. Judge then, if I should be a welcome guest in the house of her grandfather!'

The old man's face suddenly became grave, and he leaned back in his chair, as if for the moment his breathing had become difficult.

'Fool that I was!' muttered he to himself, 'not to have thought of this, not to have suspected it; and yet to any but a dolt—a madman—an idiot, the Bocca Chica, and the rock beneath, and most of all, the scene in the banqueting-room, might have taught me the lesson. Well, boy,' continued he, turning to Clifford, and in a tone which though cold, had in it nothing of anger, 'I blame you not. I blame but myself, who gave my sanction to the silly plottings of that romantic old fool, the Princess of Ursins. But still,' continued he, with something like embarrassment, 'I had formed other plans for Therese, and you will not think me ungrateful if I decline to sacrifice the castle-building of years, in favour of one who but yesterday was a stranger. No, I will not ask you to be my guest, but I honour you for your frankness, boy; and in all matters but this you will find me your warm friend. But we will speak no more upon a painful subject, and so to bed.'

He shook Clifford's hand as he spoke, but the young soldier was scarcely conscious of the act. The blow had been not altogether unexpected, and yet when it came, it paralyzed him, and half stupe-

fied he retired to his chamber to pass a sleepless night.

On the following morning the two relatives returned together to Madrid, but the manner of both was constrained. The conversation languished; Therese was not even alluded to; and on entering the city, Clifford left the carriage and proceeded on foot to his own quarters, there to pender upon the instability of human felicity.

The old noble stood once more in the halls of his fathers, yet he too was no happy man. His grandchild had hurried to his arms; a few minutes served to make her acquainted with the events which had taken place—the declaration of her lover and his rejection—and her companionship also became, in its turn, the subject of embarrassment to her grandfather. Neither, indeed, alluded to the topic, but the moistened eyelid of the young girl, and her saddened air, told their own tale. His paternal mansion, hitherto the source of so many agreeable associations to Don John Pacheco, became positively distasteful.

At the palace, things went even worse. His old rank of grand chamberlain had been restored to him, but along with it came its duties. The office required perpetual attendance upon Philip and his ambitious helpmate; and the latter never failed to descant upon the excellent qualities of his young relative, nor did she hesitate to inform him that he had been freed from thraldom and all the disgrace of a trial, at the request of, and as a special mark of favour to, the

representative of the allied powers.

Some few days after, her Majesty touched upon ground even less agreeable. Clifford had been summoned to a private interview on matters connected with his mission. His sadness had not escaped the queen's eye; and with her accustomed tact and perseverance, she had speedily elicited the secret in all its varied incidents—from his first meeting with Therese down to the expression of his hopes and their rejection.

Elizabeth Farnese was interested. The romance of the story attracted her. A woman's feelings (ever disposed to look favourably on affairs of the heart) suggested her kindly interference, but chiefly was she forced into activity by the never-failing pertinacity of Donna Laura. That mature admirer of handsome young men was not, as we have mentioned, disposed to be ungrateful to the handsomest of her acquaintance, and she took up Clifford's cause zealously. A grandee of Spain may oppose with success a prime minister—his contest is hopeless with a queen's favourite waitingwoman. The poor Duke of Escalona was attacked at every turn.

If he appeared before the king, His Majesty dilated on the diplomatic abilities of Colonel Clifford. If he ventured into the presence of her Majesty, Elizabeth Farnese never failed to call to his recollection that she was indebted to the envoy for the investiture of the duchies, and spoke in no ambiguous terms of her intention to employ, in his behalf, the unlimited powers of her patronage. As for Donna Laura, with that Doric simplicity of language for which she was so distinguished, and with which she favoured alike king and grandee, she told the haughty head of the Pachecos that he was an old fool, without either sense or gratitude; for if he had had sense, he would have gladly wedded his heiress to a man who was something like a man; and if he had had gratitude, he would not have turned the cold shoulder on one, to whom his grandchild was indebted for her honour, and himself for his head.

The duke was made of tough materials, but the hardest substances suffer from perpetual hammering, and even his obstinacy began to give way before such repeated attacks. At length he adopted a desperate resolution, and stated his own view of the case to the queen, in the hope of winning her sympathy. gained nothing by his suit. The mind, the manners, the talents, the gallantry of Clifford were all, her Majesty pronounced, with the air of one who brooked not contradiction, such as any man might be proud of in a son-in-law. Nor did his birth form an objection. Clifford's English parentage was noble, and his Castilian descent as distinguished as any in Spain. That he had no title was true, but that mattered little: Donna Teresa was the sole heir of the grand chamberlain, and by the custom of her country would inherit not only the estates, but the grandeeships of the Duke of Escalona. She consequently would lose nothing of her position by the marriage; and as to her husband, he, as a matter of course, according to the universal law of Spanish peerages, would share the rank and dignities of his wife.

The poor grand chamberlain was thus driven from his last stronghold, and the more easily, as the worthy man had not only to struggle against his enemies without, but his feelings within. The tears of his grand-daughter naturally had their influence; but what was not less effective, was the success of his new-found relative. Alas! how much of our affection depends upon our vanity. Clifford had become at the Spanish court the observed of all observers. His

beauty found favour in the eyes of the women; his gallantry and bold bearing in those of the men; but most of all, in a country where the smiles of a court confer distinction, the openly-marked attentions of the king and queen secured him universal homage. Nobles and secretaries of state bent respectfully before him. Nay, the very grand chamberlain found himself eclipsed in what he had hitherto been in the habit of considering as his own peculiar orbit. He had no choice, therefore, but to swim with the current, and consent to receive for his child, the addresses of the young man, whom all the world so unanimously pronounced worthy to be the father of the future Pachecos. The result may be guessed at. Clifford once more received an invitation to the palace of Escalona.

So far the loves of the young couple prospered, but the impetuous temper of Donna Laura did not permit her to stop half-way in her patronage. At her instigation, the queen continued her solicitations with the grand chamberlain, till at length he was prevailed on

to fix a day for the marriage.

It took place in the church of Atocha, and with all the magnificence with which the Catholic religion loves to surround the ceremonies of her creed. The Archbishop of Toledo pronounced the blessing, the king gave the bride away, and afterwards, with Elizabeth Farnese, honoured with his presence the nuptial banquet which the duke had provided for the auspicious occasion.

For seven long days the festivities continued with little intermission, and then, and not till then, were Clifford and Therese permitted to retire to the happiness and the quiet of their married

home.

Our tale has found its close, and little now remains to be added to the narrative.

To give precedence to royalty; Philip continued to live, as he had lived, the slave alternately, to use the phrase of Alberoni, 'of a woman and a breviary.' As time passed on, however, his superstitious terrors increased, and, some few years after the period we have described, he carried out the scheme of devotion which his bigoted imagination had suggested, and like his forefather, the Emperor Charles, resigned his crown to his son, and retired to a monastery. But his anchorite existence was not destined to be long-lived. The young heir, Don Lewis, died shortly after his elevation to his new honours, and the unhappy Philip was once more dragged back by his ambitious wife to an ungrateful throne.

As for Elizabeth Farnese; if happiness be the result of gratified wishes, she should have been happy; for she not only obtained for Don Carlos the investiture of the coveted duchies, but she saw die successively the three children of her predecessor, the hated Savoyarde, and her own son become heir to Spain and the Indies. Yet, if history is to be believed, her lot, after all, was little to be envied. Her power, as our readers well know, depended upon the hourly espial kept on the words and acts of her husband; but the toil was unremitting, and her health and spirits sank at length

beneath it; for the perpetual guardianship had entailed upon the gaoler, a slavery as galling as that inflicted on her bondsman.

D'Aubenton, as far as worldly prosperity went, was less fortunate. The oft-promised Cardinal's hat once more eluded his touch; and he died as he had lived, one of those extraordinary men whom Fortune sometimes brings upon the world's stage as its playthings; and who, while able to wreck governments and control the fate of empires, seem powerless to command for themselves those prizes of life, which, almost unsought, fall to their less gifted fellows.

Alberoni, on leaving Spain, took refuge in Italy, but he never recovered his former influence. Yet even in age, when the reality of royalty had escaped his grasp, he clung to its shadow, and spent his latter days in endeavouring to regain for the Stuarts their forfeited throne.

His companion, Di Castro, led a happier existence. He had, indeed, in consequence of his excess on that fatal night on which he lost the pocket-book, been dismissed by Donna Violante. But the revenues of his canonry of St. Jago were ample, and, by a double devotion to his favourite Valdepenas, he endeavoured to console himself, and not unsuccessfully, for the abandonment of his quondam penitent. As for the fair dame herself, her conduct had met with so little approval, that she was compelled to quit the house which had so long been her home; but the sentence of banishment was made less bitter by the accompaniment of a handsome annuity. As she got older, she hesitated for awhile between ratifia and religion; but the Church carried the day, and she took a young monk for her confessor. It was the mode in which elderly dames in the Peninsula cultivated devotion.

We have but a few more words to add, and these naturally refer to the principal persons in our story. About three years after the events we have narrated, the grand chamberlain was gathered to his fathers, and was succeeded in his honours and estates by his grandchild. The young duke and duchess (for Clifford, in accordance with the rule of the Spanish peerage, had been raised to his wife's rank, and bore her title) mourned long and sincerely over the grave of their kind old relative. Their further lives it is unnecessary to relate. To say that they were never unchequered would not be true; for where is the human lot that has not its black bean as well as its white? But if happiness is to be estimated according to the measure dealt out to frail mortality, there have been few unions more deserving to be envied than that of Charles Clifford and Therese de Chalais.

THE END.



THE THE

NOVEL.

BY

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